

PLUCK AND LUCK

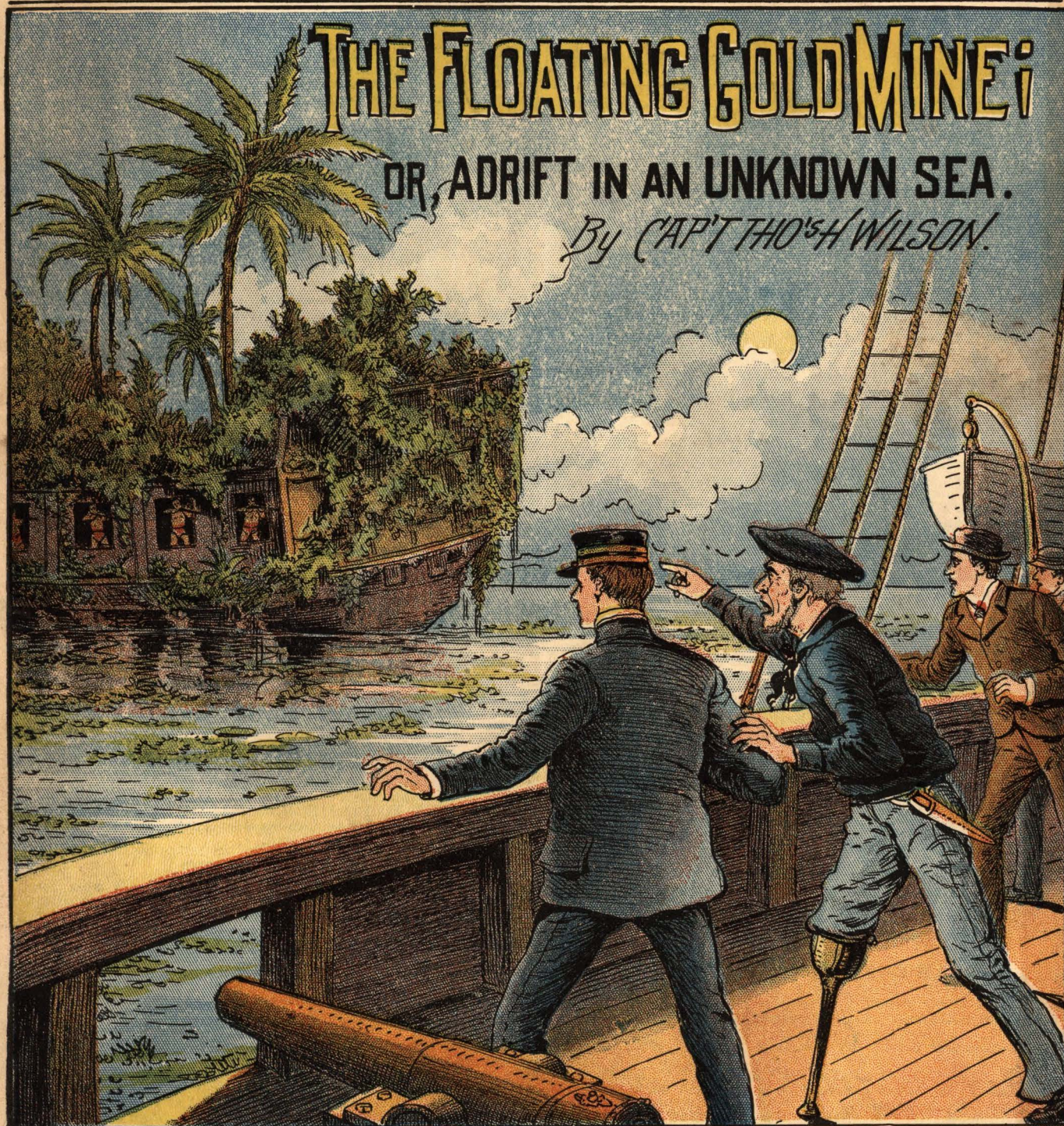
COMPLETE
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Ralph Hooker clutched Ned's arm and pointed at the island. It was moving. "It is the Floating Gold Mine!" exclaimed Ned. "Ay, an' blast me if it ain't full of savages!"

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NEW YORK, MARCH 26, 1902.

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CHAPTER I.

CHEATED OUT OF A FORTUNE.

It was an ugly night in Black's Cove—one of the most dismal, rainy, windy and muddy March nights the Pacific seaboard ever witnessed in Upper California, and the little fisher village wore a drenched look.

Black's Cove was simply a score of wretched huts, upon the walls and in front of which were spread fishnets, leaned oars and boat-hooks, and the dwellings clustered around a tiny bay.

Some distance in back of it, though nestling in amid a dense cluster of trees, was a beautiful summer residence, occupied by Jasper Redfern, the millionaire owner of that locality for miles around, and riding at anchor in the cove was a beautiful schooner yacht, owned by his only son Tom.

There was a small fleet of fishing smacks bobbing on the water, close to the exit from the cove a few flat-bottomed skiffs were tied to a small, wooden pier, and behind the little breakwater a few very handsome sailboats belonging to other residents thereabouts, were moored.

Of all the dull lights gleaming from the windows in the fishermen's huts, there was none so gloomy as that in Ralph Hooker's, for the old sailor lived all alone, with no companion but a savage bull-dog, and on the particular night in question an object of great secrecy Ralph had in view impelled him to keep the light burning dim.

He was a disabled old salt with a scarred visage, gray hair and beard, a glass eye and a wooden leg, and although he could not work, and lived poorly, he was a great drunkard, and always, until recently, spent money lavishly in the village tavern, his taciturn ways making no friends for him, and his villainous dog proving to be a source of terror to everybody.

He sat in his hut as the clocks announced the hour of eight, and his dog crouched beside him, when a light footstep was heard passing the open window, and the dog uttered a subdued growl, arose to its paws with bristling hair, glaring eyes and bared teeth, and with one tremendous spring it went out the window.

"Avast thar, consarn ye!" roared the old sailor, hobbling to his serviceable foot. "Come about, Roarer, come about an' tack back, or I'll——"

"Help! help!" shrieked a feminine voice at this juncture, in loud, piercing accents, interrupting the grumpy old fellow's tirade.

"Lor' a'mighty!" gasped Hooker, with a start. "Roarer's run afoul o' a lass. Now thar'll be a rumpus, an' goldurn me ef ther hull blasted village won't come out an' spile my plan ter talk ter Ned Harland in here ter-night!"

While so muttering the old sailor hopped to the door, flung it open, and as the light streamed out on the path in front of his hut a tragic scene met his view.

The dog had sprung upon a pretty young girl, who was attired in elegant clothing, and its teeth were buried in the cape she wore—fortunately failing to lacerate her skin thus far.

She had given utterance to the cry of alarm, and started

back with dilated eyes, pale face and trembling form, too frightened after the first shock to say a word.

"Avast thar, Roarer!" bellowed the old sailor, furiously, as he recognized the girl. "Jumpin' jingo, ef 'tain't Jasper Redfern's ward, Rosie Ringold! Come here, Roarer, ye blasted lubber, or I'll maul yer!"

The dog only snarled and growled louder, all its ferocious temper up, and shook the terrified girl's clothing harder.

The moment its teeth became loose from the girl's clothes it would doubtless fly at her throat again and perhaps seriously injure her.

Ralph Hooker realized the danger the girl was in better than any one else, for his long companionship with the beast gave him a knowledge of its relentless, savage nature.

He picked up a broken oar to go to the girl's rescue, when suddenly a youth of perhaps seventeen, who had been cautiously approaching the hut, rushed up to the girl without saying a single word, and seizing the dog by the throat, he bore it away from its deathly clutch.

"Ned Harland!" gasped the girl, recognizing the newcomer as she recovered her faculties, and reeled back into Ralph Hooker's arms, almost upon the point of fainting dead away.

The boy did not reply.

He had no time, for the struggling brute in his hands was fighting with all its great strength to get away, so that it might turn its attack upon him.

Knocked down on the ground by the fierce fight of the animal, the newcomer grimly clung to its throat, his fingers squeezing its windpipe so hard that its breath was choked off.

For the space of two minutes a terrible fight went on between the boy and the savage dog, every movement of the canine's paws scratching and tearing at the plucky fellow, low hoarse growls peeling from the monster's foam-flecked jaws, a loud snuffing at its nostrils, and its jaws snapping with vicious intonations.

Ignoring his injuries, and exerting all his strength with a rigid resolve to die before suffering defeat, Ned Harland fought on with the beast until its struggles became weaker and weaker, and the breath of life was strangled out of its body.

Then he flung the limp, lifeless carcass from him and arose to his feet, to see that Ralph Hooker had been too much occupied at reviving the half-fainting girl to lend him any assistance.

He was a sturdy youth, with light hair, blue eyes, a good-looking face, and a medium, muscular figure clad in shabby clothes.

"Dead!" he exclaimed. "By jingo, Ralph Hooker, you ought to get thrashed for keeping that brute unchained!"

"Oh, Ned!" cried the weeping girl, running up to him. "Are you hurt?"

"Not in the least, and I'm glad to see that you are all right."

"Dash it!" grumbled Hooker, "how wuz I ter know as ther lass was a-sailin' aroun' this 'ere latitude on sich a night? I s'pose ther hull willage's up an' on watch now wi' sich a consarned rumpus. That'll put a end to our chance fer a talk ter-night, youngster!"

"There isn't a soul in sight," said Miss Ringold, glancing

around. "But oh, Ned, you had better not stay here any longer. It was to warn you that Tom Redfern heard you promise to meet Ralph Hooker in his cabin to-night that I came here."

"Noble girl!" said Ned emotionally. "May heaven bless you! It nearly cost you your life! But how did that young villain find it out?"

"He was skulking near here when you met Hooker to-day, and while I was in the back parlor and Jasper Redfern was in the front room, in came Tom with the news. I could not help overhearing it, and I saw that what he told his father startled the old gentleman very much."

"Then, dash me, ther cat's out o' ther bag now," said Hooker, in startled tones, "an', ef I ain't wrong, all our lives are in danger."

"In that case, if the matter is so serious," said Ned quickly, "you had better impart your information to me before my uncle can do anything to prevent it, and Rose can go home alone."

"I may's well," returned Ralph Hooker, surlily. "I'm boun' to get even wi' him, for he's stopped my allowance o' money since last week on account of a fight him an' me had, 'cause I wanted more an' he defied me ter harm him. I'll show him I can do it now!"

"Ah! then you lived on money he gave you?" quickly asked Ned, a startled look sweeping over his face. "There is a dark rumor rife among the villagers that you were often seen stealing into Black Cove Villa at dead of night, and it is further whispered that you held some secret power over the proud and lofty master of the place. Is it really true, Ralph Hooker?"

A dark scowl came over the face of the old sailor, and he growled:

"Mebbe 'tis an' mebbe 'tain't. Leastways it might be, an' that's wot I told yer ter come here fer, 'cause I knows werry well as you'll do ther right thing by me if I blows on Jasper Redfern, an' puts ther hull o' his fortune in your hands. Now git ther lass under sail an' le's turn inter my quarters. Then I'll tell yer a story about yerself as might make yer open yer weather eye prutty wide."

"Go back to the villa, Rose," earnestly admonished the boy. "Let me learn this man's secret, for God knows what a wretched life I have led at my uncle's house ever since my childhood. Beaten and abused as I have been by Jasper Redfern, made to slave like a beast of burden for my daily bread, deprived of all advantages and cursed with every breath, now that a chance for a change offers, let me grasp it."

The girl bowed her head assentingly.

Both she and Ned lived with Jasper Redfern and his son at the villa, and the man was the guardian of her fortune, as wealth had been left her in childhood, Redfern designing that she should marry his son Tom.

Unfortunately, though, she thought the world of poor Ned Harland, the orphaned nephew of Redfern, and not only despised but hated Tom, for he was a polished and mean young rascal, a year older than Ned.

Ned Harland did not have much of a history that he knew of.

His uncle told him that he was left on his hands a penniless orphan, and as Redfern was a brutal man, and always hated the poor boy, he never lost an opportunity of heap'ng every kind of abuse on him.

Of late this tyranny had become so unbearable that Ned made up his mind to leave Black Cove Villa forever, when the old sailor had fascinated him by a few strange hints and detained his project.

The girl did not say another word, but walked away, homeward.

The boy did not fancy sending her alone, but in view of

the importance of what was transpiring he had to swallow his scruples.

When she was out of sight in the gloom, Ned turned to Ralph Hooker.

The grumpy old sailor was gazing sadly and regretfully at his dog.

"Dead's a door-nail!" he grumbled. "Well, can't be helped now, an' blast my eyes if I wouldn't kill a dozen like him fer her."

He entered the hut, followed by the youth, and they sat down.

"Well?" queried Ned. "Your story now, if you please Hooker."

"'Tain't a long yarn ter spin," said the sailor, "but this is how it goes: People thinks as ther findin' o' gold in Australia is somethin' new, but it ain't, and I'll prove it. Yer father, ole Jack Harland, wuz ther captain o' a wessel o' which I wuz second mate, an' Jasper Redfern fust officer. We wuz blowed by a storm up in ther Pacific Sargasso Sea, an' fell in wi' wot we thought wuz a floatin' islan'. It proved to be four ole waterlogged Spanish galleons, over a hundred years old, though, overgrown wi' rubbish an' bushes an' trees. It wuz filled wi' gold, an' records as we found tole us as it was mined in Australia. We loaded our ship with it an' managed ter reach California again. But afore makin' port your father died."

"Well?" eagerly questioned the boy as Hooker paused.

"Jasper Redfern took possession o' ther hull cargo o' gold, bribed off ther claims o' all han's, an', sellin' yer father's gold, he wanished. Ther crew all went their ways, an' after a few years I foun' Redfern here an' in full enjy'ment o' what rightfully belongs ter yer. I made him support me by threatenin' ter blow on him. But we hed a row, an' he stopped my allowance. That's why I'm givin' him away ter you, expectin' as you'll do ther right thing by me."

"And will you prove my claim?" asked the boy.

"I hate Redfern so, now," replied Hooker, venomously, "that I'd do anything to take him down."

"And the floating gold mine?"

"If some un else ain't found it I'm sure it's yet in ther Sargasso, an' belongs ter you by right o' yer father first findin' it. We didn't get more'n a quarter o' ther fortune on ther ole galleons, so thar must be a good store o' ther stuff left, an' easy ter git."

"How was it the treasure was never discovered before?"

"Easy enough. All ships veers clear o' them grassy seas, as it's hard ter git out o' 'em once yer gits in, an' as fer navigatin'—why, yer can't go a mile a day through ther drift without a stiff gale."

"My days of misery are past!" exclaimed the boy fervently. "I'll force Jasper Redfern by law to disgorge his ill-gotten gains, backed up by your proof, and set out to recover the rest of the treasure!"

"Why, good Lor' a'mighty! he's got proofs in his safe as ther hull thing belongs ter you," said Hooker. "I seen 'em—all papers!"

"Papers! What sort of papers were they?"

"Ther ship's papers as yer father made out; then ther custom house papers, made in yer father's name, ter git ther cargo of gold in ther port o' San Francisco; and, last of all, yer father's will, leavin' ther hull thing ter you—his motherless child—in case he should die afore makin' port!"

"By jingo! with those papers I could prove my claim without your aid, Ralph Hooker! And, by heavens, I'll get them if I have to tear them from the corpse of Jasper Redfern!"

He sprang excitedly to his feet and struck the table with his fist to emphasize what he said, when a noise at the open window caused him to look up.

Outlined in the small, square window was the head and

shoulders of Tom Redfern, his cousin, with a diabolical grin upon his face.

He wore a yachting costume of navy blue and gold braid. "A spy!" cried Hooker, pointing at the silent figure.

"He has overheard all we said—will put his father on his guard, but I will try to prevent it if I can!" exclaimed Ned, angrily.

He ran to the door, flung it open and rushed out. The next instant he stood face to face with his cousin and rival, the looks of both boys betraying the intense hate they bore for one another.

CHAPTER II.

PLACED IN A TRYING POSITION.

For an instant Ned and his foe stood confronting each other in the light that emanated from the old sailor's hut door.

There was not much difference in their sizes and build, but Tom Redfern had black hair and eyes, swarthy skin, dressed in a handsome yachting suit, and carried a slender, flexible stick.

"Eavesdropper!" cried Ned, his eyes flaming with rage. "You did not hear any good of yourself or your father, I warrant!"

"You insolent dog!" hissed the other, raising his stick. "How dare you address your superior in that impudent manner? But I'll teach you a lesson that my father has been trying to beat into your lazy carcass ever since you were a brat! I'll show you what it is to conspire, with this outlaw, against the fame and fortune of one who has given you your daily bread, clothed you with decency and kept you in a luxurious home! Take that!"

Down came the lithe stick across Ned's cheek. It raised an ugly welt.

A cry of pain and anger pealed from Ned's pale lips, and he snatched the stick from his cousin's hand, and in hoarse tones he muttered:

"I've stood all the insults and abuse from you and your father I intend to put up with. You have dared to strike me. But it shall be to your sorrow, you cur! And this is the beginning!"

He thereupon struck Redfern a resounding blow that wrung a yell of anguish from his lips, and followed it up with such a shower that his enemy danced up and down, and, screaming at the top of his voice, turned around and fled a few paces.

"Stop!" exclaimed Ned. "Stop, or it will be the worse for you!"

"Mercy! Oh, pity me!" howled the young spy.

"Sock it to ther lubber!" yelled the old sailor. "He deserves it, by gol!"

"You wait till I tell my father of this!" bellowed Redfern, threateningly. "He'll fix you! He'll put you in jail, you blackguards! Oh, oh, oh! Let up! Murder! Murder! Help!"

Ned broke the stick across his knee, flung away the pieces, and turning to the vengeful Hooker, he said, quietly:

"Now you hold the beggar till I get the start of him back to Black Cove Villa, or he will warn Jasper Redfern that I am coming, and he will be prepared to meet me."

The old sailor grunted and seized Redfern, when Ned dashed away and followed the path through rain and mud to the house.

It was a beautiful building, almost hidden, however, in a dense cluster of thick, tough vines creeping all over its walls.

There was a light in Jasper Redfern's bedroom, for the man was pacing up and down the room, with one hand pressed

over the region of his heart, as he was troubled with disease of that organ, and felt excessively nervous that night.

The room was a magnificently appointed sleeping apartment, with a small, fancy desk in one corner, and under it stood a little safe, the door of which was open.

Jasper Redfern was fifty-five, gray-headed, wore a mustache of the same color and shaggy, black eyebrows, beetled over his deep-set eyes and large, aquiline nose.

He wore slippers, black pants, a smoking-jacket of brown velvet, and had a singularly cruel, cold-blooded look on his red face.

"So Ralph Hooker is showing his fangs," he was muttering uneasily, "and the scoundrel means to divulge my secret to Ned Harland since I refused to allow him to extort his extravagant blackmail or hush-money from me any longer, eh? Well, if Tom is quick and bright to-night he will be upon the scene in ample time to thwart such a deed, land the beggar's brat in jail, and once I can prove him guilty he will go to prison for a robbery he never committed. That will effectually put him out of my way for years. Bright idea that of mine to put some of my marked bank-notes in his jacket pocket, up in his bedroom closet. The sheriff has seen them already."

Rat-tat-tat! came a quick knock at the door just then.

"Come in!" said Jasper Redfern, pausing abruptly.

He fixed his glance upon the door and started nervously and changed color when he saw that it was Ned who hurried in, pale and breathless, excited and resolute.

"All prelude is useless, Jasper Redfern!" gasped the boy, coming to the point at once. "You know why I am here! Ralph Hooker has told me the story of your treacherous rascality, and I want the papers to prove that you have cheated me out of my legacy!"

"Are you mad, or what are you raving about?" demanded the man, with a violent start and a dark scowl.

"Oh, don't try to lie—to pretend you don't understand me! I mean business, and I won't waste a minute listening to your evasions. Out with it, now—out with it, I say—where are the papers?"

He advanced, threateningly, toward his uncle, his blood fairly boiling.

"Tom's mission has failed!" thought Redfern, recoiling.

His deep-set eyes flashed fire, though, for his cowed and beaten young drudge's audacity was something new to him.

He seized a chair, in a paroxysm of rage, and raising it aloft he hurled it at the boy's head with all his might.

"Loafer!" he cried, husky with excitement. "Dare you address me this way? By all that's holy I'll brain you!"

The boy skipped nimbly out of the way of the flying chair, and it crashed through a valuable oil painting on the wall.

Ned did not flinch or lose his equanimity, as he formerly did when his irritable uncle worked himself up in these towering passions, but coolly advancing nearer to him he exclaimed:

"Don't get murderous about it! I just gave your worthless son a good thrashing, and if you fail to do as I ask you, amicably, I'll assert my rights by forcing you to disgorge!"

"By thunder, this is too much!" raved Redfern, furiously.

"You can't get out of it, I tell you!" proceeded the boy.

He was no match for his uncle in point of strength, but he felt confident of the justice of what he was doing, and was sure of winning the struggle in the end.

Jasper Redfern was glowering and fuming and gnashing his teeth, and with a cry like that of a wild beast more than a human being he sprang at the boy and caught him by the collar of his torn jacket.

"Imp of Satan!" he yelled pantingly, "you must be crazy to approach me this way, to brave me to my face, to dare presume upon a fable you heard! I'll—I'll kill you!"

He swung the boy around, sending Ned reeling upon his knees, and snatching up a long-bladed ink-eraser from the desk he raised it to plunge the gleaming point into his unfortunate young victim's body.

The vision of an exposure of his rascality arose alarmingly before his excited mind, followed by a scene in court, his trial, conviction and a long term in prison.

It made him shudder and think:

"No! Before I would suffer such disgrace, humility and misery I would murder this boy!"

The malevolent thought did not make him shrink any, and the cruel steel was about to descend in a fatal stab, when Ned tore himself free, bounded to his feet and grappled him, seizing the wrist of the hand that clutched the knife.

They stood glaring into each other's eyes for an instant, their muscles and nerves strained to the utmost.

Just then a servant, alarmed at the noise of the scuffle, looked in through the hall door and beheld the tragic sight.

"Hound!" cried Ned. "Drop that knife, or by heaven if the chance presents itself I'll kill you!"

The fatal words were overheard by the horrified servant, who rushed away to summon help to separate the combatants.

Jasper Redfern was about to reply, but his words ended in a gasping cry, a horrible look darted into his baleful eyes, and his grasp on Ned relaxed, the knife dropped to the floor and he fell.

Seizing the knife, Ned bent over the prostrate man.

His spread fingers were clutching at his bosom over his heart, his face had turned ghastly, and his eyes were rolling.

"Ned," he gurgled, "I—I'm dying! Heart—heart—heart disease!"

He strained, raised himself up on his elbow, fixed a terrible look on the startled boy, and uttering a groan, he fell over—dead!

At that moment the hall door opened with a crash, and into the room rushed Tom Redfern, followed by the sheriff and the servant.

"He is dead!" frantically cried Ned.

"Good heavens!" yelled Tom, pausing and pointing at the boy who was kneeling in a tragic attitude over the corpse, with the knife in his hand. "See! My father is dead! He—that boy—murdered him!"

"Law, sir," added the scared servant, "an' I heard him say 'I'll kill you!' to Master Redfern a moment ago. He's done it, too!"

"This warrant for robbing your father will do for now," grimly said the sheriff as he started toward the shocked Ned.

The boy dropped the ink-eraser, and seeing a solitary bundle of papers in a pigeon-hole in the safe he grasped them and sprang to his feet, realizing the danger he was in.

"Evidence is strong against me," he muttered desperately.

"I must fly and keep out of the hands of the law until I can prove my innocence. Ha! The sheriff!"

"You are my prisoner!" cried the officer, pausing.

"When you have got me!" defiantly replied the boy as he dodged the officer's outstretched hand and sprang astride of the window-sill, the sash being raised at the time. And before the astonished officer could prevent him he grasped the vines outside and descended to the yard below.

CHAPTER III.

BLOWN INTO A STRANGE SEA.

As soon as Ned reached the garden, by means of the tough, thick, creeping vines that grew up the side of the house, he

darted in amid the dense shrubbery and made tracks for Black's Cove.

"If they catch me before the truth is known I may go hung for murder! No, I'll hide myself; or, better still, go on board of Tom Redfern's schooner yacht, the Jumpin' Jenny. By rights it belongs to me, as my dead father's money bought it. All the ten boys of the crew are on board and every one is my staunch friend, for much as Tom Redfern hated me he realized that I was a good sailing master and gave me the position of captain on the yacht. He was going on a week's cruise to-morrow, but I think I'd better take it to-night!"

Clutching the precious bundle of papers in the bosom of his torn shirt, which he had taken from Jasper Redfern's safe, he rushed out on the little pier in the rain, thinking:

"Ralph Hooker said he saw the documents I wanted in the safe, and as only this packet was there, they must be the ones. At any rate, if I ain't arrested soon I'll find out when I'm on the boat."

He went down into one of the flat-bottomed skiffs at a jump, when a thrill of horror passed over him upon landing on top of a human figure, and hearing a hoarse voice grunt:

"Oh! Wot's this?"

"Ralph Hooker!" he cried joyfully, as he recognized the surly old sailor's voice. "What the deuce are you doing here?"

"Wuz jest goin' ter row out ter ther Jumpin' Jenny an' bunk in thar over night," growled the old fellow. "Ye see, that 'ere blasted swab, Tom, got away from me an' swared by ther horned-spawn as he'd have the sheriff arter me an' lodge me in irons."

"Then row like sixty, for I'm going on board, too. Jasper Redfern is dead! I'll tell you all about it later on. Row—row—row!"

Thus urged, the old fellow swallowed his amazement at the startling news and sent the skiff flying out to the yacht.

The watch on deck hailed Ned, and the two went on board.

"Call all hands on deck!" hurriedly said the young fugitive to the watch. "We must set sail and put out to sea at once. I will tell you why later on. Hustle around lively now. Ralph, come up forward here and help me to slip this anchor. We can afford to lose it as there is another on the port side!"

"I reckon as thar's be'n trouble up thar at ther willa," shrewdly answered the wooden-legged man as he helped the boy.

"Dreadful—dreadful! If you and I don't get out of this locality as quick as possible we will both go to prison!"

"Whew!" whistled Hooker. "Just what I suspected, sure guns!"

Down went the anchor-cable through the hawse-hole with a rush and a clanking, and up came the watch from below, every one of the crew clad in blue uniforms, and not one older than Ned. They were all village boys from Black's Cove.

"Single reef the mainsail, and start her up lively, boys!" cried Ned as soon as he saw them. "Two of you come forward and sheet home the forestay sail. Look alive now, for I've slipped the anchor and the Jumpin' Jenny is adrift!"

The nimble young sailors obeyed the order with alacrity, and within a few moments the sails were apeak."

Ned grasped the wheel and headed the yacht for the opening in the cove—a narrow, deep stream, the high embankments on either side not more than ten yards apart, and a small lighthouse, which was built on a rock to one side of it, reflecting a powerful calcium down on the dark water.

The wind was blowing a half gale from the northeast, kicking up a nasty chop sea as the incoming tide ran against it, and the moment the white wings of the yacht were started

she swiftly shot across the cove and darted for the passage. Hardly, however, had she gained it when upon the crest of the right-hand embankment, under the lighthouse, appeared the sheriff and several deputy constables, all armed with rifles.

They had been tracking the fugitive boy, and when they saw the yacht moving it attracted their attention to her.

The light of the calcium reflected full upon Ned and showed him clearly outlined against the dark, stormy background.

"There he is—escaping on the yacht!" yelled the sheriff.

"I'm discovered!" groaned the boy in dismay.

"Stop the boat or we'll fire at you!" added the sheriff as he turned to the constables and ordered them to aim at the boy.

Ned saw the four men point their rifles at him and knew very well that every man in the party was a crack shot.

They were seldom known to miss their aim, and as the yacht was not more than one hundred feet from them they seemed to hold the boys' life at their mercy.

The boys of the crew looked amazed as they clustered near the young helmsman, and the first mate advanced and asked: "What's the meaning of this, Ned?"

"Nothing—nothing. I'll tell you later," he replied hastily.

"Haul to, I warn you for the last time!" yelled the sheriff, as the yacht came gliding abreast of where he stood with his men. "Don't let him escape, you fellows! He has killed his uncle, Jasper Redfern, up at the villa!"

"Ned, is this true?" demanded the boy who addressed him before.

The pale-faced Ned glanced searchingly at his crew, and saw that one and all were honest fellows who would not uphold a crime.

The shadow of suspicion cast upon him by the sheriff's words caused them to draw away from him, with looks of askance.

"No! It is an infamous lie!" he cried, vehemently.

He saw a relieved look sweep over every face, and the sheriff cried:

"Will you obey me or not?"

"I leave it to you, boys," quietly said Ned. "You all knew me from childhood, and never knew of a wrong. Answer for me."

For an instant deep silence reigned.

Then such a shout arose that it made Ned's blood tingle.

"No! No! No!"

"We won't haul to!"

"Fire, and be hanged to you!"

"He is innocent of this charge!"

Such were the cries that arose on all sides, bringing tears of gratitude to the hunted boy's eyes, causing his heart to swell with pride and honor, for he knew that even in the face of death every boy on board had sublime faith in his honesty and innocence.

But the defiant shout had scarcely died away when there came the spiteful crack of four rifles, and had four of those boys been standing at the time each one would have fallen dead.

"Down! Down!" had been Ned's cry while they were shouting.

And they followed his example only just in time.

Fifty yards yet separated the yacht from the headland, but the gale shot her ahead like a ball from a gun, and ere the officers could reload their weapons she was out on the sea, buried in the midst of the darkness and storm, and flying with bowsprit almost submerged, far out of rifle range!

with unabated fury and the only manner in which Ned Harland saved the yacht from destruction was by keeping it before the gale.

With triple-reefed mainsail aft, to balance the bobbed jib forward, the beautiful schooner had been scudding under almost bare poles, half the time nearly buried in the billows.

After the lapse of seven days the storm blew itself to pieces and the yacht withstood her rough usage better than many larger, heavier and stancher ships would have done.

One hundred feet long, provisioned for a month, and with every luxury on board, she was a veritable floating palace, although the ravages of the storm had spoiled the beauty of her outside paint and created some havoc among the rigging.

Upon the night of the seventh day, although the sky was murky and threatening, the wind and waves abated and the schooner rode sluggishly upon a heavy, dark sea.

But where?

No reckoning could be made until noon of the following day, but Ned imagined they must be many, many miles out upon the Pacific.

He stood at the wheel, fatigued and anxious, the watch on deck worn out and dozing at their posts after the exhausting fight they had to keep the Jumping Jenny afloat, when old Ralph Hooker stumped up to him, with a solemn look on his face.

"I reckon as it's ther hand o' fate," said he, "an' nuthin' else, but ha' ye noticed ther waters as we're in, sir?"

"The sea looks dark and forbidding enough," said Ned.

"No, 'tain't that, neither, wot I'm speakin' on," said the ugly old fellow, "but durn my sister's cat-tails ef we ain't in a drift!"

"What—driftweed?"

"Ay, ay, sir; an' wot's more, ther Sargasso Sea!"

"The drifting ground of the Floating Gold Mine—impossible!"

"Ay, now, 'tis though. Looker our course—due nor'west o' California. That'd bring us ter ther leetle round sea in ther ocean, no bigger'n ther square of a degree. It's made by ther Japanese current a-sweepin' up ter ther Aleutian Islan's an' makin' a circle aroun' an' under Alaska. Part o' ther main stream they calls ther Mexican current, wot shoots down ter So' America. But this leetle Sargasso's made by a branch current wot goes back t'ward ther Japanese current again, an' we're in it."

"Then we must be north of the Sandwich Islands?"

"O' course we is; an' ther p'int is ter get out o' here."

"We can do it slowly with wind and sails."

"I reckon we kin, and mebbe we'll find ther Floatin'——"

"Land ahead!" cried the lookout just then, interrupting Hooker.

"It must be an island in the Sargasso," said Ned.

A dark object athwart their course met his view, and he let the schooner drift over toward it, and within an hour they came within a cable's length of it.

Just then the bright, silvery moon appeared through a rift in the clouds and slanted down upon the small, tree-grown island, and showed them that the sea they were in was made up of dense seaweed, driftwood and all sorts of ocean debris.

"How strange! It is like an ocean oasis!" said Ned to Billy Roe, the first mate of the schooner. "Let us come to anchor off the shore."

"Ay, ay, sir!" cheerily responded the little first officer.

"Hold hard thar!" excitedly interposed Ralph Hooker. "Look!"

He clutched Ned's arm and pointed at the island.

It was moving.

The week that followed the escape of the yacht from Black's Cove had been a week of terror, for the storm raged

"It is the Floating Gold Mine!" involuntarily exclaimed Ned.

"Ay! an' blast me if it ain't full of savages!"

As Ralph made this startling remark the side of one of the old Spanish treasure galleons swung into the moonlight and exposed to their view a row of small windows, in each of which stood massive negroes aiming rifles at the crew of the yacht.

They seemed to know that the yachtsmen were after the precious cargo of the strange floating island, and evidently meant to contest their claim to it.

CHAPTER IV.

CHASED IN THE DARK.

A thrill of dismay passed over Ned Harland upon seeing the Floating Gold Mine occupied by the armed negroes; and the entire watch on the deck of the Jumping Jenny were disgusted.

The island so strangely formed by the combination of nature and the four old Spanish treasure galleons was drifting with the circular current of the little Sargasso Sea in the ocean; but as there was some wind left Ned concluded to get away from the island.

"All hands on deck!" he shouted. "Man the sails and hoist every inch of canvas the sticks will carry. We must leave here, for on a nearer approach the armed negroes in the windows of the galleon will fire upon us!"

Up came the watch from below, and around spun the wheel in Ned's hands, the driftweed sluggishly permitting the schooner to come about on a tack away from the island.

The moon slanting down upon the rifle barrels protruding from the windows of the galleon made them gleam like polished silver, and plainly disclosed the grim array of black faces and glittering eyes fastened upon the boys.

The island was slowly revolving with the tide, for they were really upon the outer margin of the grassy sea, and it presently turned the windows away from the schooner.

But still another row of windows in the next galleon, which laid aboardside, against the stern of the first, was presented to the boys on the Jumping Jenny; and if the island still continued to revolve it would have shown four flat sides exactly alike, with windows.

Before the lively boys could get up more sail, though, the yacht was swept by the current almost against the floating island.

"Arm yourselves!" shouted Ned, foreseeing that nothing could prevent a collision now. "There are plenty rifles on board. I can't stop the boat from bumping against the galleons, and those niggers are armed with modern weapons, and look like fighting men!"

As the boys obeyed this order Ned saw a large number of the black men come swarming into view amidst the shrubbery on top of the island, armed with more primitive bows, arrows and spears.

They were all big, lanky fellows, with woolly hair like the natives of the Sandwich Islands south of the little Sargasso.

The boy commander now had on his neat, white flannel yachting costume, the cap marked "captain" in gilt letters in front, and around his waist a belt was buckled, into which he thrust two revolvers, which one of the boys brought from the cabin.

"Ahoy, there!" he shouted, hailing the blacks in hopes that if they understood English he could subdue their hostility without fighting.

But only a series of wild yells and a jumble of words in

an unknown tongue replied, and let him know that they were as ignorant of his language as he was of theirs.

"It's no go," he said to Ralph Hooker, who stumped up to him at the head of the whole crew, who now had armed themselves. "But you had better go below, old fellow."

"Wot!" growled the surly old sailor. "Me desart when every lubber counts! Oh, no; not much! Axin' yer parding fer speakin' out plain. Goldurn me ef I ain't s'prised! Last time I wuz on ther Floatin' Gold Mine along o' yer father it wuz teetotally desarted, sir!"

"Look out!" interposed Ned, watchful as a cat. "Down behind the bulwarks, every mother's son of you—they're going to fire!"

Bang! bang! came a volley.

But the bullets sped harmlessly over the heads of the crouching boys, and before they could return the fire the moon disappeared.

A cloud bank swept over it and everything became enshrouded in dense gloom.

A moment later the schooner drifted against the island.

There came a shock, then a chorus of war-cries from the negroes on the galleons, and an instant later a swarm of the black fellows were pouring over on the deck of the Jumping Jenny.

"All hands to the port side, ready to fire on them!" cried Ned.

He realized that friends could not be distinguished from foes if the boys were scattered over the deck, and as soon as his crew obeyed the order he knew that they were separated from the blacks.

"Now, boys, fire on them!" was his next ringing order.

A thunder of shots came from the crew, followed by a most terrible chorus of yells from the blacks, and as the island "blanketed" the sails just then, most of the blacks who were on deck had just time to scramble back upon the island and carry their wounded friends with them.

"After them!" shouted Ned. "Drive the stragglers off the yacht!"

"Hurrah!" yelled the boys, charging on the negroes who yet remained.

Ned led a rush across the deck, another boy taking his place at the wheel, and amid a tremendous uproar the invaders were put to flight at the points of the crew's rifles.

The moment the deck was cleared of the last man a daring idea suggested itself to Ned, and he shouted:

"If we can drive the negroes off that island, boys, the whole vast treasure is ours, to be equally divided among us. It will make us enormously rich. What do you say to assaulting it?"

"There are hundreds of niggers on the island," said Billy Roe, the first mate, in dubious tones, "and only a dozen of us to fight them."

"I don't propose a hand-to-hand fight."

"What then?"

"Plant a mine of powder on the island and blow it up."

"We might scare the niggers away by doing it, but might sink the island."

"The plan is worth a trial, as nothing can be done unless we dislodge them from the island. I don't believe we would sink the ships."

A small keg of powder was brought up on deck and Ned seized it and sprang through an open gangway on the island.

A slow match had been inserted in the keg at Ned's order, and the boy had a box of lucifers to ignite it at the proper time.

All the negroes had disappeared from the windows and from the verdant crest of the island upon that side, else the young captain might not have so boldly invaded the enemy's ground.

Roe accompanied Ned, armed with a rifle.

On top of the island not a vestige of the galleons' decks were to be seen, as a very thick layer of dirt, deposited during a century, covered it and trees and shrubs, the seed of which, blown there on the wind, had taken root, formed a jungle on the earthy crust.

The two boys cautiously advanced in search of an opening into which the keg might be dropped, wondering where the savages got their modern weapons, and mystified over the manner in which they procured food and water to sustain their lives.

"Don't go too far," whispered Ned, pausing a dozen paces from where they landed, which must have been over the midship section of the old galleon beneath them. "We may be walking into an ambush."

It was so dark they could not see a yard ahead.

Ned set the keg down, lit a match, and ignited the fuse.

As the tiny flame of the match flared up for an instant, a most unearthly yell arose in the midst of the trees ahead of them.

"Run! We are seen!" he cried, and he dashed away.

Billy Roe followed him, but unfortunately, in the gloom, they ran in the wrong direction, and instead of returning toward the schooner they went off at an angle, making a quarter detour of the island.

Behind them they heard the patter of many flying footsteps, and knew that the blacks were in hot pursuit.

Then, like a flash, it occurred to Ned that they had lost their way, and he suddenly came to a pause, exclaiming breathlessly, as the sound of their pursuers suddenly died away in another direction:

"Billy, we have lost our reckoning!"

"What's to be done, then?" groaned the boy.

"I'll show you. It is the least dangerous. Come on. The footsteps we heard have ceased. Our enemies may be lurking only a yard away, though, and perhaps are sneaking up to us. This way, my boy!"

He glided off at an angle.

But only a few steps, for a bulky figure stood in his way—the form of a negro—and both uttered unguarded exclamations and recoiled.

The black was the first to recover, and reaching out a long, bony arm, his fingers closed upon Ned's throat like a vise.

"Billy—a negro's got me!" gasped the boy. "Run!"

He dealt his assailant a blow with his pistol as he spoke, and the black vented a yell of pain and staggered back a pace.

In a twinkling Ned had torn himself from the man's clutch.

His cry brought the sound of flying footsteps to Ned's ears again, and the boy realized that a large number of men must be approaching.

"Billy!" he gasped.

"Ay, sir!" replied a voice beside him.

"Come—quick!"

And with a rush they sped on again, stumbling over unseen vines, plunging into bushes and bumping against trees.

The blacks were after them in hot haste.

"When we reach the edge, spring into the sea and swim for the Jumping Jenny!" panted the little captain.

"All right—and here we are!"

Bang! bang! bang! rattled a volley of muskets behind them just then, but they had come to the edge of the island and both dove down into the sea as the shots pealed out.

The next instant they disappeared beneath the water.

expert swimmers, when they arose to the surface they easily kept afloat.

"Make as little noise as you can," whispered the young captain, "for we are not out of danger yet by any means."

They were swimming side by side when this warning was given, and they heard some of the blacks excitedly talking up on the island that towered above them.

"Which way?" queried Billy, in low tones.

"To the right, and back the way we came."

"Then we'll have to creep along the face of the galleons' side! Good Lord, but it's a hard job to swim in this seaweed!"

"Don't exhaust your strength by violent exertion; if you do you won't last to get back to the Jumping Jenny."

"Oh, I'll take it easy!"

"Now, if the moon will remain hidden a while, and not reveal us to the coons, Billy, we'll be all right."

"Might's well give up that idea, for it's breaking out from behind the clouds now, and will flood the sea with so much light that we'll be an easy target to shoot at!"

Billy Roe's words came true.

Out from behind the clouds popped the moon, flashing down a dazzling light, and they saw that the schooner had drifted fifty fathoms away from the island, under pressure of the wind, which had reached her spread canvas.

She was still moving away, and the island, too, kept going in the opposite direction with the tide encircling the Sargasso, so that it did not take long to create a wide breach between them.

The boys swam for the yacht.

But ere going a dozen paces the blacks on the island saw them and gave utterance to loud cries of exultation.

"Look out, Billy, they will fire at us now!" warned Ned.

"Dive when you expect their shots."

A number of spears and arrows came whizzing out toward the boys, and they dove into the grassy water to escape them, when the keg of powder on the island suddenly exploded.

There sounded a fearful report, a great flash of smoke and lurid flames, and a united cry from the negroes all over the isle.

Dirt, weeds and trees were blown in every direction, high in the air.

When the boys arose to the surface uninjured by weapons or flying missiles from the explosion, they saw what happened, and caught a glimpse of hundreds of running, shouting negroes all over the island, some of whom were diving into the sea.

Their panic was excessive, for a great trench had been excavated by the explosion, baring the half-rotten deck of the ship beneath.

The negroes could not account for the furious outburst.

"That powder keg must have been as tight as a bottle and very strong, else a mere puff of flame and smoke would have been all that would have occurred," said Ned. "There was only forty pounds of powder in it."

"The niggers are so scared," replied Billy, "that they won't care to remain on the island if a second explosion takes place there."

"I'll complete their terror then when we return on board, by bombarding the beggars with the signal gun from the deck of the Jumping Jenny."

"I wonder how they got on the island?"

"Give it up. It's a mystery I can't solve."

In a short time the boys were midway between the island and the schooner, and the fast-breaking clouds showed the moon at short intervals.

Ned glanced back at the island and started violently.

"Billy, we are pursued by a man in a canoe!" he exclaimed.

"Good Lord! What'll we do now? My rifle is lost on the island and we haven't got a weapon with which to defend ourselves."

CHAPTER V.

THE HUMAN TARGET.

Neither Ned nor Billy were struck by the shots fired at random at them in the darkness, and as they were both

Out from the island darted a dug-out, containing a man, with remarkable speed, and within a few moments it shot up to the two boys.

Reaching over the side the burly native made a grab for Billy, but the boy dove down, dexterously eluding him.

A guttural exclamation of disgust escaped the man, and he lifted his paddle and struck Ned a blow on the head that stunned him and caused him to cry out with pain.

Before the dazed boy could take another stroke the black grasped him by the hair and pulled him into the boat.

There was an upright pole in the middle, probably used as a mast, and to this the negro bound the boy in a standing position, with some pieces of tough, wiry vines that lay in the canoe.

When Ned pulled his wits together he was a helpless prisoner, for Billy had come to the surface and swam on to the schooner.

The crew of the Jumping Jenny saw that Ned had come to grief, and fired several rifle shots at the negro boatman.

It was a dangerous proceeding, though, for a stray shot was apt to strike Ned and kill him; but the whistling bullets flying about the negro filled him with alarm.

He dove overboard and swam for the island, toward a point where a dozen blacks stood upon the shore gazing out at him from a distance of two hundred feet.

A cheer pealed up from the crew of the yacht, for the boys felt sure that Ned was safe now; but an instant later these cries were changed into those of the most intense dismay.

The natives on shore made a human target of Ned, and were firing their arrows and spears at him.

The flying missiles came through the air in showers, some sticking into the dug-out, some falling short of their mark, others whizzing over the bound boy, and several flying so close to his body, limbs and head that the shafts grazed his skin.

He turned a mute, appealing glance at the yacht and saw that Billy Roe had just clambered on board, and that the vessel was heading toward him under a full pressure of canvas.

"Lord help me!" as a barbed shaft hummed by his face with a sickening sound. "It only needs an inch more for any of those shots to strike my body. If the arrow-heads are poisoned the slightest scratch may make short work of my life."

Just then he saw Billy Roe throw open a gangway at the leeward side of the yacht, and the small, brass signal gun appeared at the opening, trained to bear upon the blacks.

An instant later a puff of flame and smoke and a sharp report came from the gun, and with a singing sound, not unlike a swarm of bees, a charge of rifle bullets went flying by the boat Ned was in and struck in the midst of the blacks.

Instantly their firing ceased.

A number of them were seen to fall.

None of these fellows seemed to have been armed with rifles, else they might, at the conclusion of their sport with arrows and spears, have sent a leaden messenger crashing into Ned.

He was liberated from his uncomfortable position and helped on board.

"That was a lucky escape," he remarked. "If it wasn't for the whack on the head that long-legged nigger gave me, I might say we didn't get a scratch. It was a trying ordeal to have to stand there, whether I wanted to or not, and get shot at, though."

"Better veer away from that 'ere islan' a while," advised old Ralph Hooker grumpily. "If they once gits thar tackle on us we'll get in trouble."

"But if there's treasure in the Floating Gold Mine I ain't going to resign it to those negroes, by any means!"

"I reckon not; but we kin blow them 'ere swabs ter glory at a safe distance wi' our weapons, easy enough, without a-

boardin' ther island as you did an' riskin' yer life wi' no show o' beatin' 'em."

"That's so. Eventually we may drive them off as they seem to have boats. But when we ran the island down it was almost as safe to be upon it as it was upon our own deck. I wanted to make them understand that we would brook no trifling, and strike terror to their souls. If a savage thinks you are afraid of him he will take advantage of it. Moreover, I was curious to see what the island, formed on four old, waterlogged ships, was like."

"Which way shall I head her now?" queried the quarter-master.

"At an angle from the island's course—south. We must not lose sight of it until our purpose is accomplished, and we will remain at a safe distance until a means can be planned by which we can chase the darkies off the island and get possession of its wonderful cargo."

The watch then dispersed.

Next day the sun shone in a clear, blue sky, all trace of the storm was gone, and the Jumping Jenny, under reefed sails, was sluggishly drifting through the sodden sea grass, when Ned went into his cabin with Ralph Hooker.

Taking the bundle of papers from a locker, which he had snatched from Jasper Redfern's safe on the night his uncle died, he said:

"I haven't had time to examine these things before, Hooker, on account of the storm and our trouble with the natives, although I have been wild to do so. I hope they are proofs of my right to Jasper Redfern's enormous wealth, as you surmised."

"Ain't got no doubt about it," asserted Hooker, confidently.

The boy's blue eyes sparkled as he opened the old documents out and a moment later he exclaimed excitedly:

"By jingo—I've struck it! It's all right! See, Hooker—here is my father's will, leaving the cargo of gold on the Yankee Girl to me in case he should die. Here is the Custom House paper my uncle had made out in my father's name, to unship the gold into San Francisco; and this other paper is an account of the sale of the gold."

"I knowed it! I told ye I'd seen 'em afore."

"Jasper Redfern was a villain! Retaining the fortune that belonged to me, he treated me like a dog all my life. No doubt, upon his return from that cruise some qualm of conscience caused him to hunt me up, when I was a child, and take care of me. Or it might have been that, fearing I would grow up and some day learn the truth and wrest the fortune from him, he wanted to keep me where he could have a constant watch on my movements. He thus thought he could baffle every attempt I might make to gain my heritage!"

"Sail ho! Sail ho!" shouted the lookout at this juncture.

Ned replaced the papers and ran out on deck with his glass.

A large vessel, apparently a sloop, was heading toward the Sargasso under a full pressure of canvas.

Curious over seeing a vessel coming for a spot that most craft shunned like death, they watched the stranger; and after a few hours she hove up within a half mile.

Ned was startled as he watched her with his spyglass.

"By jingo!" he exclaimed, turning excitedly to his crew. "It is the Sea Spider from Black's Cove, and her whole crew; but instead of her rightful owner, Tom Redfern is in command of her, for I can see him!"

CHAPTER VI.

TOM REDFERN'S MOVEMENTS.

The vessel Ned beheld was one of the large, beautiful pleasure yachts which had moored in Black's Cove on the

night Jasper Redfern died, and was owned by one of Redfern's tenants, a wealthy gentleman.

After the flight of Ned the sheriff and the constables who had been hunting for the fugitive returned to Black Cove Villa, and found Tom Redfern pacing up and down the room in which his father lay dead, while a neighboring physician, who had been called in, was making an examination of the corpse.

"He has put out to sea in your yacht," announced the sheriff.

"What! Escaped? Why did you permit it?" passionately asked the young man, a dark scowl crossing his brow and a wicked gleam shining in his eyes.

"Couldn't help it," declared the sheriff. "There's no catching him now unless he is pursued in a boat."

Tom Redfern uttered a suppressed expletive.

"Then I'm in for trouble," he muttered savagely. "But I'll follow him up, if I have to sail over the entire Pacific, until I catch him, and put an end to his life for this deed."

"Ralph Hooker was on the yacht with him," continued the sheriff, casting an uneasy glance at the son of the dead millionaire.

Tom Redfern started violently and an alarmed look crossed his face.

"Hooker with him!" he cried, involuntarily.

This fact gave rise to alarming suspicions in his mind.

He recollected all of the dark story of treachery Hooker imparted to the boy in the old fisherman's hut, and thought:

"What if this story is true? Harland stole a package of papers from father's safe before he fled. They may be proofs of my father's guilt. Between the two they could get up a case in court which might put Harland in possession of all my father's wealth. That would leave me a penniless beggar. Oh, the idea is too horrible to stand! My position with Harland would be reversed, and the humility would kill me! By heavens, I won't permit such a calamity. I'll hunt the beggar's brat down and put him where he can do me no harm! And as for Hooker, I'll shoot the old beast on sight!"

A rankling, vengeful sentiment was gnawing at his heart and a haunted, uneasy and fearful feeling assailed him.

But suddenly another feeling dawned upon him and made his pulse quicken with a feeling of intense relief.

"What a fool I am to worry and borrow trouble this way!" he muttered, with a mocking laugh. "Harland has murdered my father. That is a hanging crime, and when he is apprehended they'll send him to the gallows. That will put an end to his designs upon the fortune which I now expect to inherit. Besides, there is a warrant out for him on a charge of robbery, which would be sure to bag him, for father put up that bank-note job on him, and as the sheriff saw the money in the pocket of his jacket hanging in the closet upstairs, that scheme will have to be carried out!"

At this juncture the physician arose and said:

"Mr. Redfern, your father was not murdered!"

"Eh? Sir! What!" gasped Tom, with a violent start.

"There is not a mark of violence upon his body, as any coroner's jury will testify, so you can let your mind rest easy on that score."

Tom was hoping that his father had been murdered by Ned, for since he was dead the means by which he perished was a matter of indifference, save that a crime could be fastened upon Harland.

"Not murdered?" he gasped, very much dismayed over the news.

"He died of heart disease, as every indication proves."

"You lie! He was murdered!" raved Tom, white with fury, and a haughty, tigerish expression leaping to his protruding eyes.

"Sir!" haughtily exclaimed the doctor, drawing himself up

and regarding the boy with a frown of annoyance and surprise. "You amaze me, Master Redfern. Your language is very vulgar and insulting, to say the least. I am amazed at you."

"You lie! Confound your hide, he was murdered! He was, I say, curse you! And I'll make you prove it! I'll make you, sir, do you hear?" excitedly raved Tom, in a violent fit of disappointment, for the physician's words baffled his hope of sending Ned to the hangman for Jasper Redfern's death, thereby putting the fugitive out of his way.

So impetuous was his rage, though, he did not stop to weigh the violence of his words.

The physician cast an indignant glance of scorn and aversion upon the boy, and in cold tones he exclaimed:

"It almost looks as if you wanted it to appear that your unfortunate father was murdered. I see through it. You hate Harland as everybody knows in this locality, and expected to vent your spite on him by seeing him hang for a crime. However, as I respect the dead, lying there, and will not stay here any longer to suffer your outrageous insults, I wish you good-night. You can depend that when the regular coroner's investigation is made by me in that official capacity, I will render a verdict exactly as I just gave it to you."

And with a stiff, formal inclination of his head the doctor departed.

Tom Redfern was wild.

"Harland will return and rob me of my wealth!" he thought. "He can get out of jail on bail, if I have him arrested for robbery, and ruin me. Only one course remains for me to save myself. I must find him and silence his tongue forever. And I'll do it! I'll buy the Sea Spider, cargo her for a cruise, and get on Harland's track. When we meet he will perish! Rosie Ringold was mixed up in the affair. Perhaps she knows the whole story. If Harland and Hooker go under she might fix me. For safety's sake I'll lure her aboard the Sea Spider and take her with me. Then I'll be safe, for I've got plenty money of my own to buy the crew over into my favor, to do anything I wish."

On the following day the doctor, who was the county coroner, and an impaneled jury, held an autopsy on Jasper Redfern's body, and found a verdict that the deceased perished of heart disease.

The master of Black's Cove Villa was buried that day.

In the meantime Tom bought the Sea Spider, hastily prepared her for a long cruise, and telling his father's lawyer to leave the estate unsettled, excepting to pay off small bills, until his return, he finished all preparations for his trip.

Rosie was invited on the yacht, under a plausible pretext, and as a trunkful of her clothing had secretly been taken aboard, they set sail and abducted her, putting out to sea, and asking of the crews of every vessel they met if anything was seen of the Jumping Jenny.

Upon discovering the trick that was played upon her, and ignorant of what the motive was that prompted it, Rose was at first alarmed, indignant and uneasy.

But as days passed by without Redfern offering her any indignity, or mentioning the cause of his action, she grew more resigned and less frightened, although it was her resolve to get away from the Sea Spider the first chance she got.

Acting upon information, the Sea Spider's captain steered his sloop for the Sargasso, as he was told that the Jumping Jenny had been sighted in its vicinity, and the thought occurred to him:

"He has come up to the strange, grassy sea to try to find the Floating Gold Mine which Hooker told him about, and no doubt means to find it, and come back rich, anyway, if he can't wrest father's fortune from me. I may meet him, and if there is any virtue in my resolution I'll get away from him anything in the line of treasure which he may secure. Then I'll return to land, get my father's money, by process of law,

marry my wealthy young prisoner and I will be an enormously rich man!"

The young rascal now had a potent motive for his intense enmity to Ned Harland, and when the two vessels came in sight of each other his joy knew no bounds, for he had liberally bribed his crew and thereby won their sympathy over to his vile projects.

There was not one of the Sea Spider's crew who was not of a more or less depraved turn of mind; and with their cupidity inflamed at Redfern's promise to equally share whatever treasure they might get, not a man on board would have hesitated to sacrifice the lives of Ned and old Ralph Hooker.

From the crew, arrayed in white duck uniforms, as they crowded to the bulwarks of the Sea Spider, the ugly young commander drew Nick Doe, the first mate, over against the cabin and said:

"The time for action has come. Lower a boat and you and I will board the Jumping Jenny. I'll engage Ned Harland in an altercation, provoke him to fighting, and you can shoot at him. We'll get in our boat during the confusion and row back here."

"But you'll pay up, an' no humbug?" asked Doe.

"Ten thousand dollars, as I swore to you last night, if you kill him."

They separated with this understanding, and the moment they were gone the face of Rose vanished from a nearby window.

It was open, and the curtain concealed her from view, but she overheard every word they uttered, and with a feeling of intense horror.

"Poor Ned!" she gasped. "This hired assassin will murder him. Oh, what a fiend Tom Redfern is! Why is he so bitter against Ned? I was so glad when it was proven that he did not kill his uncle. Why did Tom abduct me? Why does he want Ned killed?"

She did not understand all the details of the case.

But she made up her mind to escape from the Sea Spider and warn Ned of the plot against his life, if possible.

Through the deadlight in the stern she saw the gig go down on the davit lines, and saw Nick Doe fasten it by the painter, astern.

Then he ascended a rope ladder to the deck.

As soon as she saw the boat the daring plan of stealing it flashed into her mind, and she went out on deck.

A refractory jib at that moment was engaging the attention of every one, and the girl glided in back of the helmsman, who was watching the crew struggle to furl the sail which had stuck half way down the stay.

In a twinkling she went down the rope ladder, into the gig. She understood how to row, and untying the painter she sat down, seized the oars and quickly and silently pulled away from the yacht.

Not until she had gone several hundred yards toward the Jumping Jenny was she discovered by Tom Redfern.

Then he uttered a startled yell and called the attention of the whole crew to her; but the sloop could not be managed just then to follow her, on account of the jib which had become fastened half way down the stay, despite the efforts of the crew to loosen it.

"The girl!" howled Redfern, furiously. "She's escaping to the Jumping Jenny! Lower a boat—quick—and let me follow her and fetch her back before she can get on board of my enemy's boat!"

Down went a quarter boat a moment later and he embarked in it with four of his crew, and made the discovery at the same time that Ned Harland must have seen what the girl was doing, for he had a boat lowered, manned by four boys, and was being pulled toward Rose.

The girl saw her peril and rowed hard toward Ned's boat.

The crews of both yachts cheered and yelled to their respective leaders, as they rowed like mad toward the girl to capture her.

She was soon midway between the two quarter-boats and lost an oar, her boat coming to a stop in consequence.

It was an exciting race for the two boats' crews, and they were straining every muscle and determined to fight hard for possession of the girl if they chanced to meet.

CHAPTER VII.

A BATTLE WITH OARS.

Ned Harland and Tom Redfern's quarter-boats approached the gig in which sat Rosie Ringold with equal rapidity, cheered on by the white-clad crew of the Sea Spider and the blue-dressed boys of the Jumping Jenny, who were crowded at their bulwarks, looking on.

Both yachts had come up in the wind.

There they lay with idly flapping canvas, the caught jib on the sloop finally sliding down the stay of its own accord, and the reefed sails on the schooner ready for managing her.

Escaped from Redfern's boat, and an oar lost overboard, the girl was cast in a fever of fear lest her guardian's hated son might be the first to reach her and attempt to return her in bondage to the yacht.

She saw by the looks of Ned Harland and his crew, though, that they would not let the Sea Spider's crew carry her away without severely contesting their power to do so.

"Oh!" she gasped, her face pallid and a look of agitation on every feature, "Redfern may attempt to shoot Ned, as he planned with Nick Doe, the first mate. I fear I may not be able to warn Ned in time to save his life, as I set out to do."

Within a few minutes both quarter-boats dashed up to her.

The distance between them was exactly equal.

"Ned!" shrieked the girl, "look out for Tom Redfern! He intends to murder you!" and in her excitement she arose to her feet.

The shock of the two quarter-boats striking the gig cap-sized it, and hurled the girl into the grassy water.

In a flash Ned dove in after her, for she had gone beneath the surface, and he feared that the treacherous seaweed might hold her down in the brine to perish before his eyes.

He had her in his arms when he arose to the surface, and both were gasping and sputtering when Redfern's boat was pulled toward them, and at Tom's command his crew lifted their oars.

"Brain the beggar!" he hissed.

Four long oars were held threateningly above the head of Ned Harland, when between the young rescuer and his enemy's boat flashed his own quarter-boat, the four boys instantly raising their oars.

Then down came the eight oars against each other, with a rattle like a quick discharge of pistols, and the two crews sprang to their feet and a fierce battle was fought on the spot.

In the midst of the fight Ned got back on the boat with the girl, neither of them any the worse for their immersion.

Enjoining the girl to crouch in the bottom of the boat, out of harm's way, Ned grasped an oar and dealt Tom Redfern a blow with it, just as the young rascal drew a pistol from his pocket and aimed it squarely at the young fugitive's heart.

The blow sent the revolver flying, and knocked Redfern into the water, where he floundered about, yelling at the top of his voice for help, while Ned remarked:

"Take that for your villainy, and I'll show you what it is to attempt your dirty work on me in future!"

He paid no further attention to Redfern.

"Billy Roe!" he cried to his first mate, "seize a pair of oars and follow their boat with ours. I'll take your place. It's man to man, now, with favor to no one. Go for the rascals, boys, and thrash them well! Hurrah—that's it! They're weakening! Crack their heads and lather their jackets! Pound them with a will, and, by jingo, it is with sore feelings they'll sneak back to their yacht!"

Biff—bang! Thump—bump! Crack—whack! went the oars, and many a howl arose as painful blows were rained down; but the boat's crew from the Sea Spider began to flinch.

And just as Tom Redfern crawled back in his boat his friends were sickened at the punishment they got, gave up the fight, and, rowing away with all their might, they left Ned master of the situation and in possession of his little lady-love.

A tremendous cheer of triumph burst from the crew of the Jumping Jenny, and the crew of the Sea Spider echoed it with a howl of pretended derision, although it was plain enough that they were deeply mortified.

"Shall we follow them?" questioned Billy Roe eagerly.

"No," was Ned's reply. "They've got enough of us for to-day, and I don't believe they'll trouble us very much for some time to come. Row back to the schooner, boys, as this young lady must feel quite uncomfortable in her drenched clothing. Fortunately there are several yachting costumes of yours, Rose, and other clothing in the stateroom you always occupied when you went out sailing in the schooner. You therefore can change your dress as soon as we get on board."

"I am so glad I got away from Tom's boat!" ejaculated the girl.

"And so am I. But how does it happen that my cousin is here on another man's yacht, and that you are with him? What brought you flying from the Sea Spider in that now overturned gig, with Tom after you, and—"

"One question at a time, Ned," laughingly interrupted the girl as the boat was being rowed back to the schooner. "Now listen, and I will tell the whole story of your public vindication of the charge of having killed my guardian, and all that has happened since then."

"My vindication!" joyfully cried Ned. "Oh, is it possible that my good name is cleared of the awful stigma of crime cast upon it by the unlucky circumstances that seemed to conspire to get me in trouble?"

"Your misfortunes at home are over, anyway, Ned," earnestly said the girl, and thereupon she related all that is now known.

Ned's happiness was almost complete when he learned that he was proven innocent of the hideous charge.

Upon the whole he half expected it, though.

In return for the girl's story he related his adventures to her, and when the boat reached the yacht the whole party was taken on board amid the enthusiastic shouts and congratulations of the whole crew.

Rose found the stateroom to contain all the trifles necessary for a young lady's toilet and comfort, and, having established herself there, she felt safer and more contented than she had been during her enforced sojourn upon the Pacific in the Sea Spider.

Ned related the news to his crew, and ended by saying:

"You see now, boys, that when you refrained from handing me over to the sheriff, during our escape from Black's Cove, you did not err in your judgment of my innocence."

"Blow me tight, if this 'ere ain't a go!" observed Ralph Hooker, in glum tones. "That blasted lubber, Redfern, is a-steppin' in ther murderous shoes o' his dead father jest as quick's he kin, an' dash me ef I don't expect ter see him swung from ther end o' a yard-arm some day!"

"To prevent us from claiming his father's stolen fortune

so that he can inherit it," said Ned, "it is evident that he has been tracking us with the intention of doing us some mischief."

"Murder us, ther lassie said!" growled Ralph, grumpily.

"He is bad enough for anything," said Ned, "and you ain't much better than he is, you old rat! Didn't you keep silent about his father's rascality to me as long as Jasper Redfern paid you the hush-money you got? You only gave him away when he refused to pay you any more."

"Humph!" grunted the wooden-legged man, pulling at his gray whiskers, and blinking his glass eye. "Ain't doin' that no longer, am I? It shows yer wot ther thirst fer liquor'll do fer a ole tank like me. Makes him lose all reckonin' of decency. I'm a-goin' ter reform when I makes port ag'in."

"Can't you reform now?"

"Not's long as ther's any rum or gin aboard o' this craft."

"So that's how the land lays, is it?"

"Ay! Won't yer let me have some o' ther grog, an', I'll—"

"Oh, get out! You are no good!" said Ned, walking away in disgust.

An astonished look crept into Hooker's solitary eye as he gazed after Ned retreating into his cabin to change his clothes, and he grumbled:

"Dash me ef ther young lubber ain't ongrateful, arter all I done ter try an' git his father's fortune back fer him, an' a-tellin' him about ther floatin' gold mine. I'd like to keel haul him, blow me if I wouldn't! No liquor? Hum! Ther case is desperit. Mebbe I'll go ower ter ther enemy. Anyhow, all ain't lost. Thar's a lamp full o' alcohol down in ther fo'cas'le, an' I'll stow it ter wet my whistle. Thank ther Lord I ain't come ter drinkin' kerosene yet!"

With which sage and comforting reflection the ancient mariner stumped away across the deck, dove down below and vanished.

The Sea Spider got under way, and, turning her bowsprit to the westward, glided off, while the Jumping Jenny, keeping the floating island in sight, slowly drifted on with the tide.

An hour later they saw Redfern's boat come about suddenly and tack over toward the floating island.

"Look!" laughed Ned to Rosie, as they hastened up in the bow of the schooner, both clad in dry, natty costumes. "They don't know that the gold mine is overrun with blacks, and as they doubtless recognize it, they'll try to board the island. Then you'll see the fur fly. It will do me a power of good."

"If they would do all the fighting and drive the savages off the island," suggested the girl, brightly, "you would have an easy task to pitch in afterward and get the treasure, if any of it remains there yet."

"No such luck for me," replied Ned, with a grimace.

The sloop glided as straight as an arrow toward the dangerous island, but the moment it arrived within ten fathoms of it a series of reports pealed out from its side, and the Sea Spider hove to as quickly as it started for the island.

The concealed natives had fired upon them!

By the aid of his spyglass Ned saw the utmost confusion going on, and then the sloop swept around and beat a retreat, the crew firing a scattering volley back at the islanders.

A short time afterward the crew of the sloop revengefully sailed up to shooting distance of the island, kept up a steady firing at it for an hour, in spite of the volleys of shot, arrows and spears returned, and then sailed away to the westward.

By nightfall it was out of sight, and the Jumping Jenny drifted nearer to the island, as Ned was curious to see what damage his enemy had done to the natives.

Nothing was seen of a single black, however, and when the night watch was set, the dark clouds in the sky, obscuring the moonlight, cast a deep gloom on the sea.

Ned left instructions with Billy to keep in plain sight of the floating island, and then turned in.

No danger was suspected by the crew of the yacht, but had the night been clearer a sight might have met their gaze that would have filled them with terror.

Down from the sides of the island hundreds of armed negroes were dropping into the grassy water, their skins greased, their weapons fastened to their bodies, and the savage looks upon their faces denoting their resolve to end the struggle in one fell battle, to the bitter end.

Hundreds of these dusky warriors swam to the schooner, under cover of the darkness, and, perfectly at home in the sea, they surrounded the yacht on all sides, only their woolly heads appearing above the surface.

The watch on deck was dozing, and the lookout and the quartermaster, unsuspecting of danger, were careless.

Then, like so many dark, grim shadows, the silent hordes edged in around the drifting yacht and the dusky warriors began to swarm up to the deck by every available means.

CHAPTER VIII.

CAPTURING THE FLOATING GOLD MINE.

The silent attack of the black men might have been a success had not an unforeseen accident happened to one of them—their chief.

He was climbing up a rope that passed one of the port-holes of Ned's cabin, and as the boy had arisen and saw the man's figure, he suspected at once what was going on.

The port-hole was not much bigger than a man's head, and therefore would not admit one of the blacks into the cabin, but raising an alarm, Ned darted forward and seized the man, as the glass frame was open.

He caught the black by the wool, and bracing one foot against the wall, he pulled with all his might and dragged the negro's head in through the opening.

The man yelled.

Then he struggled and fought to get free.

It was useless, though, for nothing but his head and neck came through the little, round window, and there Ned held him.

His eyes bulged and rolled, his features were twisted out of shape, and from between his white, even teeth there pealed the wildest protest in his own strange language, but Ned grimly hung on to his wool.

Seeing the rope the negro had been climbing, between the ebony neck and the port-hole frame, Ned seized hold of it and drew the end through with one hand, gave it a coil around the darky's neck and then tied it.

Pulling it taut he fastened the end to a leg of the stationary table.

"I've got you now," he chuckled, eyeing his scared prisoner's head; "if you attempt to pull away you'll choke to death."

The man realized the danger and kept quiet.

But the first uproar he made had alarmed the watch on deck, and the watch down in the fore-castle, all of whom apprehending danger, armed themselves and were ready for the first of their foes who appeared above the top of the bulwarks, as they now saw the horde of swimmers.

A rattling volley drove them back in the water, and by the time Ned got on deck not one of the blacks had gained a footing there, despite the wonderful care they had taken to succeed.

The quartermaster had been luffing the yacht, for the wind was rapidly freshening, and as Ned observed it he called for a calcium light with which the yacht was provided.

As soon as it was on deck he shot its rays down in the water upon the swimmers, and saw that the number of them

was far greater than he imagined could be comfortably held upon the island.

"I fancy but very few are left on the Floating Gold Mine," observed the boy, "and think we had better try to carry it by storm now that they are off of it and swimming helplessly in the water. They can't fight down there, and we have them at our mercy. The yacht can easily beat them back to the island with this wind, and as I see that the moon will soon appear we will have plenty light."

"Queer they didn't attack us in canoes," said Billy Roe.

"Probably they only had a few, and counted on overwhelming us with a surprise, but their attack is a failure."

"Shall I order the yacht to be run for the island?"

"Yes. Meantime it will be easy to repel any of the bolder of these fellows who may attempt to get on board."

"They won't! They're demoralized. See there—they are all swimming back for the island as they know that they're balked."

"All but one! I've got a nigger caught by the neck, with his head pulled through a port-hole, in my cabin!" laughed Ned. "And we may make use of him before long."

Billy passed the word to the quartermaster, who put the yacht on a tack that would bring her up with the island.

The army of woolly heads festooning the top of the sea, all going toward the Floating Gold Mine ahead of them, in a compact mass, was a singular scene, not one of the negroes uttering a word as they swiftly cleft the waves.

Nor did any of them now make another attempt to board the yacht.

The Jumping Jenny made a circuit of this strange mass of humanity, sweeping along with flowing sails, and Ned took a noosed rope and went down a ladder to the body of the negro who was dangling out of the port-hole.

He found the fellow's fingers desperately clutching the rim of the port-hole, and his flat feet planted against the side of the yacht to prevent himself from slipping.

Had he let go the fall of his body would jerk his head back and the rope around his neck would have hung him.

Ned fastened his arms and legs, and bringing an end of the rope up to the deck he put it in the hands of two of the crew.

Then he went down in his cabin, loosened the black's neck, and, shooting his head out the window, the boys pulled him up on deck.

He was a helpless prisoner, and it was evident, judging by his profuse ornaments, that he was a person of high rank in the tribe.

Just then Ralph Hooker came stumping over to the group who was clustered around the scared prisoner, and the old fellow exclaimed:

"Ye've got ther grapnels on ther chief, Master Harland!"

"Is it possible? How do you know—by his ornaments?"

"Ay, ay! I uster gab some o' their lingo once. Will I try him?"

"Why, yes—by all means—if you can."

"Mebbe he don't, an' mebbe he do talk Sandwich Islan'," said Ralph, "but that's as far's my eddicashun goes wi' the genteel furrin' langwidges."

He said something in guttural words to the captive, who by this time had been bound to the bulwarks at a belaying-pin rack.

The captive looked amazed.

Then he replied in the same tongue with a sullen air.

"Reckon as we understands each other," said Hooker, grimly.

"By jingo, that's lucky! Ask him all about the island, their forces, their means of living, intentions and the cargo of gold," said Ned, delightedly.

The surly old sailor nodded and asked in the prisoner's language:

"How many men are left on the island?"

"Half of my tribe; enough to kill all your people if you venture there," the chief replied lyingly, for he realized that Ralph was up to.

The old sailor translated all that was said as he proceeded.

"How do you manage to live there?" he asked.

"By fishing," was the reply, "and the holds of the ships are natural rain cisterns."

"Are they stowed with gold yet?"

"No. There is nothing but water in them."

"You lie!"

"Then discover for yourself."

"We shall, for see, we will reach the island ahead of your men! The vessel has already left them far astern, and we will all be on the shore to receive them with firearms when they come. Driven away, in time their strength will fail, they will drown and we will own the isle."

The chief stared.

Ralph's words had a prophetic tone.

And later circumstances seemed to prove his assertions.

"No, no!" gasped the chief. "This must not happen."

"It will. We own the island. How did your tribe get there?"

"We went there in canoes to make war on a neighbor on one of the Sandwich Islands. A storm arose and drove us into this sea. Here we found the isle."

"Have you occupied it long?"

"Nearly a year. We could not get away, having but few canoes. And we did not know which way to go, to return to our island home."

"Explain where you got the rifles and ammunition your men had."

"We brought them from our native island. Ships' crews often stopped there and traded with us. We got our weapons from them."

"Now I understand the mystery. But if you were on such terms of good friendship with ships' crews, how is it your tribe acted so hostile toward us? You must have had a strong reason for doing so. What was it?" significantly asked the old sailor.

The chief did not reply, but an uneasy look settled over his face.

"You have lied about the golden cargo," said Hooker drily. "I see through it. You realized the worth of the gold and wanted to keep it for yourselves to exchange it for trinkets, if you ever should get back to your native island. But we will soon find out the truth!"

He questioned the man further.

But the chief refused to reply.

By this time the yacht approached within a hundred yards of the Floating Gold Mine, which now had a deserted appearance.

Not a soul was to be seen on it and the army of negroes swimming toward it were yet a great distance away.

The island was still drifting in the powerful Japanese current that swept in seven-eighths of a circle around the little Sargasso Sea, giving the entire sea of weed a rotary motion from its axis to its outer edge, and the motion of the current had kept it receding.

Ned's heart began to flutter with excitement, for he was soon to penetrate beneath the earthly crust of the island and see whether it yet contained the fabulous amount of gold Hooker asserted to have been there.

Was the gold intact or not?

The boy's interest was centred on this question.

Within a few moments the yacht came up in the wind, beside the island, the sails came rattling down and hawsers were carried ashore and fastened to several palm trees.

The moon came out and failed to disclose a single native.

Ned posted his entire crew, fully armed, at intervals all around the edge of the island, and when the swimming

negroes came in range Ralph Hooker yelled a warning to them to keep off or perish from the rifles then aimed at them.

A few kept on, doggedly, but the majority paused with looks of wild alarm on their dusky faces.

Those who advanced were shot, and it served to check the rest.

A skirmish was continued all night with them and Ned was kept busy every moment of the time directing his boys how to act in order to keep the blacks off the island.

When daylight came the sun shone out from a clear sky, and the half-exhausted negroes finally swam away and vanished in the distance, leaving Ned in undisputed possession of the island.

What became of them he had not the remotest idea, but it was obvious that they had gone away, despairing of getting on the island again.

Now was Ned's chance to investigate the holds of the galleons.

He had found an opening in the ground over each of the four old vessels, and, accompanied by Rosie he took a ship's lantern and they went down a wide ladder, made by the negroes, into the galleon under them.

They found themselves in the place between decks.

On every hand was evidence of the natives having lived there, in the form of crude weapons, shields, skin clothing and pottery.

Not a soul of the tribe had been left on the island.

The windows through which the negroes shot at Ned's party were at one side, and a large, yawning, dark hatchway showed the boy the means of penetrating the submerged hold, where the golden treasure was supposed to be stowed away.

He left the girl where she was and going down in the hold with his lantern he found it half filled with rain water.

Raising his light he glanced eagerly and anxiously around, expecting to see the gold taken from the Australian mines.

A cry pealed from his lips and he shrank back, his face as pale as death and a wild look upon his face.

The hold did not contain a particle of gold!

"The treasure was a myth!" gasped the boy.

His heart sank like lead, for the disappointment was so severe that he could hardly refrain from an outburst of grief.

CHAPTER IX.

STEALING THE JUMPING JENNY.

There was nothing but rain water in the hold of the galleon in which Ned stood with his lantern, and the disappointed boy hated the idea of returning between decks, and telling Rosie no gold was there.

"Ralph Hooker isn't given to falsehood," the boy muttered, "but it seems as if he was a confounded liar when he declared that these vessels were laden with gold."

Ned recalled to mind that his captive, the chief of the negro tribe, declared that there was no gold, and nothing but rain water in the galleons, and it now seemed as if the black man told the truth.

The boy returned to Rosie.

"Well, Ned, did you find it?" she asked, brightly.

"No. There is not a particle of gold in the galleons," he replied.

"What!" demanded the girl, in utter amazement.

"Either there never was any there or it's been taken away."

A disappointed look lengthened Rosie's face.

She had been wrought up to a pitch of curiosity over the matter, and had been expecting to hear of and see a vast

fortune in gold nuggets that would outrival the wonders of the Arabian Nights.

"Oh, pshaw!" she exclaimed, almost crying with vexation. Ned sighed; he felt worse than she did.

"Let us investigate the other galleons," said he.

They ascended to the surface of the island and went down a ladder through a circular opening into the next vessel.

This ship was yet in the same state in which the Spaniards had probably left it, in the cabin section, nearly a century gone by.

They entered a huge room filled with antique furniture of oak, the walls festooned with rusty armor, and weapons of an ancient pattern, and upon the floor laid, scattered, several human skulls and bones.

Whether they were relics of the ancient sailors, the dead of the negro crew or the black men's victims, they could not tell.

"These old vessels are built of teak," said Ned. "It's the most durable wood for ship building there is. That is why the galleons have so nobly held together all this time."

"Did you ever discover how they came to be floating here?"

"No. And I don't believe Ralph Hooker ever learned, or he would have told me. Here is a hatchway. I'm going down in the hold. Remain here until I return."

He vanished through an opening in the floor, and Rosie sat down on an old iron-bound sea-chest, in the dark.

She had not been seated long when down came Ralph Hooker with a lantern.

"Ah, Miss Ringold! Bless me, I didn't know as you wuz here!" said he.

"Mr. Harland and I are looking for the treasure," the girl replied.

"Oh! Waal, now, ye've sailed inter ther right port ter o it."

"On the contrary, we found the hold of the first ship we searched empty."

"Dash me; is that so, miss?" said the grumpy old fellow, with a start.

"Perfectly true," replied the girl.

"Then, blow it, some lubber 'as taken it away!"

"Are you sure there ever was any on the island?"

"Sure? Lord a'mighty, d'yer take me fer a liar?"

"It looks like it."

"Holy sufferin' Neptun', ma'am, didn't we run a-foul o' ther floatin' islan' just as I said it wuz? Ain't everything jist wot I represented?"

"In regard to the island it is."

"Don't that prove as I've made port here afore?"

"It seems to."

"Then, gosh hang it, miss, all ther rest on it's true, too!"

"Probably the gold was taken away."

"Mebbe 'twas an' mebbe 'twasn't. I'll prove as it wuz here once, though."

"Do so."

"In that werry sea-chest yer a-sittin' on thar's one o' ther galleon's ole log-books writ in Spanish; leastways I 'member as once it wuz thar."

The girl arose and lifted the lid of the iron-bound chest.

"I can speak and read Spanish fluently," she exclaimed.

"If it is here I'll soon learn whether you told the truth or not."

The chest was filled with ancient nautical instruments, a few old volumes, and an assortment of rusty weapons, all tumbled together in a confused heap, much as if the blacks had been looking at them and then disdainfully flung them in the chest again.

The girl withdrew the books and saw that they were printed in old-fashioned type, in the Spanish language.

One was an old volume on navigation, another a copy of

the story of Don Quixote, the third an account of the voyage of Columbus, and the last one was written and proved to be a log-book.

Unfortunately, though, most all the writing was so faded and blurred that the girl could only decipher a few lines here and there, but with her curiosity aroused she read these paragraphs aloud:

"* * In the Tropic of Cancer, by the grace of God—masses are blown away by the hurricane, and to unite our strength have we lashed the four galleons together strongly. * * driven into a strange, grassy sea, which is encircled by a swift, powerful current, that gives these waters a rotary motion. The violence of the storm is not felt here as badly as upon the open waters and * * * from Australia, where we mined the gold with which we are laden—a king's fortune. * * * starving to death—unable to depart from this terrible sea of weed. Heaven help us! * * *"

This was all Rosie could read.

But it was enough.

It proved that the old sailor's story was true in all particulars.

"Humph!" grunted Hooker, "I s'pose yer satisfied now?"

"Forgive my doubts—I wronged you, Ralph Hooker," replied the girl frankly.

Ralph touched his forelock.

"Reckon as some one's been piratin' ther gold in t'other galleon," said he.

"Where can Ned be keeping himself so long, I wonder?"

"He has gone below."

"Gone below, has he?"

"Yes; and—ah, here he comes now!"

Just then the boy appeared, coming up through the hatchway with his lantern; and seeing Ralph he nodded to him.

"Did you think I was never coming back?" he laughed.

"You must have scoured the hold, Ned," the girl replied.

"Well, I went through the vessel, and I've found the gold!"

"What! Is it really true?"

"I tole yer so!" grumbled Hooker, "an' mebbe I didn't; but I reckon I did know it, 'cause I've been down in the other two wessels an' foun' 'em heavy ballasted with ther mineral."

"Have you, now?" said Ned. "That's a good bit of news. I suppose the first galleon we examined must have been the one my father emptied of its treasure and carried to California when he was here with you, Hooker."

"Ay, ay, now, that's true, Master Harland. I didn't think o' that afore."

"This log-book is an interesting relic," said Rosie, handing it to Ned, "and when we've got leisure I'll translate its remarks to you, as far as I can. But it corroborates all Hooker told you."

"My plan now," said Ned, "will be to throw the ballast out of the Jumping Jenny and substitute some of the gold for it. Then I'll take the island in tow of the yacht and try to drag it through the sea to the coast of America. There we can unload the old galleons, and with the gold in our possession, cast the isle adrift again."

"A wise plan," remarked Rosie, sagely, "for by doing so you will be able to get every bit of the gold."

"Now that the negroes are no longer on the island to fight off any stray cruiser who might fall in with the island," said Ned, thoughtfully, "if we don't do something to keep the cargo for ourselves Tom Redfern may return with the Sea Spider and try to get it from us."

They then went up on the island and imparted the news to all the boys of the schooner's crew.

They gave utterance to a cheer of delight that could have

been heard a mile away, and Ned was overwhelmed with a battery of eager questions about the gold, that almost took his breath away.

"Hold on, boys!" he exclaimed, laughingly. "It's all in great, irregular bars. The Spaniards must have mined the ore and melted it from the quartz before shipping it on the old galleons."

"Let's go down and see it!" suggested Billy Roe.

A murmur of assent from the rest ratified this wish.

"With all my heart," said Ned. "Go on, boys. Hooker will show you the way. Miss Ringold and I will go back to the yacht."

With a rush, like so many schoolboys, the jolly young sailors dashed away, dragging Ralph Hooker along with them so fast that he almost kicked his wooden leg out of gear, and when they had vanished Ned and the girl returned to the Jumping Jenny.

"We are much luckier than I at first imagined we'd be," said Ned as they reached the deck. "Tom Redfern may have a chance to cheat me out of the fortune his ungodly parent stole of my dead father, but once I get this gold into civilization I'll have twice as much as he."

"I wonder where he sailed to in the Sea Spider?" asked Rosie.

"Oh, he hasn't gone far. This golden freight on the galleons and the vindictive desire he has to spit his spite out on me will soon bring him back our way again."

"I hope not, for if you and he meet you will fight."

"Perhaps," said Ned. "Cousins don't always love each other. Anyway, I'd like to have a chance to knock some of the fight out of the conceited young upstart. Ah! look at that fellow!"

He pointed at the captive negro chief and paused.

Tied to the belaying-pin rack at the port bulwarks, the big negro was glaring balefully at Ned and gnashing his teeth with rage, for his captivity was galling to him, and he held a vengeful spite against the boy for wresting the island from his men and driving them into the sea.

The girl shuddered at the ferocious appearance of the savage.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "what a fiendish face! It is horrible!"

"Don't alarm yourself," said Ned, reassuringly. "He can't budge an inch with the bonds my boys put on his wrists. Come into the cabin and we will glance over the old log-book together."

Glad to get out of the baleful influence of the savage's glaring eyes, the girl hurried into the cabin with her young lover, and they seated themselves at the table, when Rosie gave Ned a translation of as much of the ancient log-book as she could make out.

By the time it was finished Ned understood the whole situation.

He was about to comment upon it when a strange jar and tilting of the Jumping Jenny wrung an exclamation from his lips and caused him to spring to his feet.

"What was that?" gasped the girl in alarm.

"It feels as if the yacht is moving," he replied, in surprise.

"But the sails were all down."

"True; yet this queer motion is familiar enough."

"Could the crew have come back and—"

"Wait and I'll see."

He ran to the cabin door, seized the knob and attempted to push it open, but it resisted as if the bolt outside was locked.

"Can't you open the door?" anxiously asked the girl, arising.

"No; it is fastened. Here—I'll look out at a window."

Going to one of the small windows he peered out on deck. The jib was raised, the hawsers cut, and the captive negro

stood at the wheel, guiding the yacht away from the island, which was then over fifty yards astern.

Upon the shore stood the crew, with old Ralph Hooker in front of them, every one of the boys fearfully excited.

Sawing his bonds in two on the rough, moulded side edge of a belaying-pin, the treacherous savage had evidently liberated himself, locked the absorbed boy and girl in the cabin, and silently raising the jib, he cut the hawsers, and was stealing the yacht.

CHAPTER X.

DEMONS OF THE DEEP.

The savage did not have much of an idea how to manage the yacht, but he had seen, from the island when he was ashore, enough to give him an insight to separate it from the land.

Moreover, when in the Sandwich Islands he must have frequently come in contact with vessels and seen the principle of operating them.

The jib was flying loose, thus giving the yacht enough head-way before the wind to let her creep away from her moorings, and although she ran with a zig-zag motion, as he did not know how to hold the wheel steady and the rudder straight, yet she soon put a big breach between herself and the land.

The shouts of the boys on shore, who had come up from viewing the ballast of gold in the galleons, caused a grim smile to hover over the dark face of the savage.

But presently he grew impatient at the slow progress of the yacht, and abandoning the wheel he ran up forward, and seizing the jib-sheet rope he hauled it in, thinking the boat would go along faster if the sail did not hang or bulge so slackly.

The result was that the boat rounded up in the wind and stood there, with her bowsprit beating up and down, refusing to move to the starboard or port as long as her nose was in the wind's eye.

This was puzzling to the black thief, and he tried his best to force her ahead by running aft again and turning the wheel.

The yacht would not fall off a point.

Then the black chief slackened the jib-sheet line away off, and the wind, catching the sail, it pulled the rope out of his hands, drew it through the block and blew out of his reach at an angle from the stay, where it tossed and beat with reports like firearms.

It made the black man frantic.

He attempted to hoist the fore and then the mainsails, but his strength was not only inadequate to the task, but the canvas was furled in stops, and baffled his ingenuity to get it open.

The two other forestay sails were furled, and upon finding that he could do nothing with them the savage uttered a howl of rage and gave up all further efforts to sail the boat.

Crouching down behind the bulwarks at the bow he peered over the top at the island which was gradually drifting away from the yacht, although the Jumping Jenny was on the move with the current, now, and following in the wake of the Floating Gold Mine.

Locked in the cabin, Ned tried every available means to get out.

It was useless, however.

"I can't burst the door open, the windows and port-holes are too small to admit the passage of my body, and the skylight is hooked on the outside!" he explained to Rose.

"What in the world shall we do now?" the girl asked, in

blank tones. "The negro can't manage the yacht, and we are too far away from the island for any of the crew to reach us."

"I've got a pistol in my pocket and could threaten the beggar," said Ned, "but that wouldn't force him to open the door. I was going to have that bolt taken off to-day, but forgot all about it. That shows that a person ought never put off till to-morrow what can be done to-day. The bolt wasn't of any use out there, anyway."

Just then Rose happened to glance out of the port-holes in the stern, and a look of deeper alarm flitted over her face. "What's the matter?" asked Ned, observing her changed countenance.

"Look out the port-hole and see for yourself," she replied.

Ned did so, and his agitation became as great as the girl's. Afar in the distance the Sea Spider was approaching.

There was no mistaking the cut of her sails, even at the distance she was yet from the helpless schooner, and Ned's heart beat faster.

"I'm afraid this will settle it!" he exclaimed huskily.

"Will Tom Redfern attempt to board our boat?"

"Decidedly, if he sees that she is at his mercy.

Rosie's face turned deathly pale.

"He won't take me back alive!" she panted.

"Oh, even if he should capture us we might afterward escape him."

"He wants to marry me, and I hate him like poison."

"Well, he can't marry you on the sea without a minister."

"But he can keep me a captive till he reaches port, and although I would then escape him, without consenting, in the meantime he could trouble me with his disgusting attentions."

"Oh, never you fear, Rose—I won't permit it!"

"Perhaps you may be made powerless to aid me."

"Time alone will tell. You—ha! what's that?"

An unearthly yell of the most intense agony suddenly interrupted him, and as the sound evidently came from out on deck, he rushed to the window to peer out, when suddenly something struck him.

It was long, round and slippery, yet quite soft and flexible, but the blow in the face it gave Ned knocked him down on the floor of the cabin, and then the queer, squirming object dashed in through the open window after him.

It coiled and uncoiled itself, turning, twisting, whirling and lashing about like a huge, white snake without eyes, much as if blindly groping about in search of the amazed boy.

Rose uttered a piercing shriek and recoiled back against the bulkhead, with dilated eyes and restrained breath, trembling from head to foot and so startled that she could not utter a word.

Out on deck the wild howls continued, the voice fraught with a tone of utter despair that was simply heart-rending.

Mingled with the shouts were explosive strings of guttural expletives in the voice of the savage who had possession of the yacht, by which Ned realized that it was the man whose cries alarmed him.

He bounded to his feet, and as he retreated from that long, sinuous, lashing arm he glanced hurriedly through the window and saw the black man lying upon the deck, writhing in the clutch of a most hideous monster of the sea.

It was an octopus!

The arm writhing in through the window was attached to the body of another devilfish of the same species.

And upon deck, thrashing about, were several more of the ugly, barnacled beasts, their long tentacles knocking everything about, smashing light objects to pieces, overturning casks, bursting some of the ropes, smashing glasses and creating havoc everywhere.

These monsters often travel in schools, and board ship if there is provocation and an open gangway.

As Ned retreated the arm swung around over his head and the cup-like sucker on the end struck against Rose.

She ventured another cry.

"Ned, save me! Oh, this pain!"

She felt as if her neck had been riven by an electric bolt the moment the monster's cup fastened upon her tender skin, drawing and puckering it up just as if a red-hot iron burned it.

There were some dishes on the table, remaining from their last meal, and among them a carving knife, which Ned snatched up.

He dealt the wriggling arm a terrific blow with the keen blade and severed it in two, both parts convulsively writhing with life afterward, and that which was attached to the body withdrawing through the window, out to the deck, as quick as a flash.

The boy sprang toward the girl and tore the severed tentacle from her neck, Rose moaning with agony, and flung it to the floor.

An ugly wound was left on her pure, white skin.

"Poor girl," said Ned, pityingly. "The pain must be dreadful!"

"I can hardly stand it," replied the girl, tears streaming from her eyes.

"The medicine chest is in here, and I'll put a salve on it that will draw the inflammation and relieve the pain at once."

He did so, and afforded the unfortunate girl instant help. She laid down on the sofa and Ned peered out the window. The five devilfish were yet there, demolishing everything.

But the one which had twined its arms around the savage dragged him to the open gangway, and as a last yell of agony and fear pealed from the unfortunate wretch, it toppled into the water with him, dragging his body beneath the surface.

The others instantly followed it, and within a few moments none of the monsters were left on the yacht.

When Ned turned his glance upon the Sea Spider again it was within hailing distance, and he saw his enemy bearing down upon the drifting schooner, watching it with a glass.

"Redfern will board us presently!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, dear; trouble never comes alone!" sighed the girl.

"The worst of it is we can't rebuff him!"

"I dread meeting the young rascal again!"

Within a few moments the sloop yacht luffed up in the wind, came about and then stood up to the schooner.

Broaching to, alongside, by a dexterous move, a grapnel was flung over the side, the two yachts bumped, side to side, and while his crew were securing them together Redfern sprang on the deck of the Jumping Jenny, with several of his sailors.

There was an evil glow on his smooth, dark face as he darted a swift glance around, and said to his first mate:

"This is singular good luck, Nick Doe!"

"Couldn't be better, sir."

"The yacht's adrift, with not a soul on board."

"Better search and be sure, sir."

"That's so. Scatter, boys! I saw the whole crew on the isle, by the aid of my glass, just now. They must have lost her after going ashore, somehow. But judging by the disorder on deck here it looks as if there had been trouble."

The boys dispersed, to ransack the Jumping Jenny in search of any remnant of the crew, and Redfern walked up to the cabin door, unbolted it and flung it wide open.

He was confronted by Ned, on the threshold, with a drawn revolver.

"Harland!" he gasped, chokingly, as he reeled back.

"We meet again, Redfern!" coolly replied Ned as he pointed his pistol at the young rascal. "And if you don't get off of my vessel I'll shoot you!"

"Your vessel?" savagely snarled Redfern, recovering himself.

"Yes, you son-of-a-thief! It was bought with money that belongs to me—money that your father robbed me of in my infancy. Now go!"

"Help!" yelled Redfern, pale with passion.

His friends ran up to him and he pointed at Ned.

"Make a prisoner of that hound!" he hissed furiously.

The sailors made a rush for Ned, who did not flinch, and seeing that they would overwhelm him he pulled the trigger.

The revolver missed fire.

Before he could cock the weapon again the sailors were upon him.

Knocking Ned down they wrested the pistol from him, despite his struggles, and bound his hands behind his back with a piece of marline, rendering him utterly powerless.

"Mercy!" shrieked Rose, appearing in the doorway at this juncture, pale and terrified. "Let him be! You monsters! Let him be, I say!"

"By the gods, it's Rose!" roared Tom Redfern, gloatingly, and he rushed up to the girl, caught her by the wrist and pulled her out on deck.

"Unhand me, Tom Redfern! Don't you dare lay a hand on me!" she shrieked.

"Keep still, you minx!" shouted the triumphant young rascal. "I've got you back and I'm going to hold you, too."

"What'll we do with Harland, sir?" questioned Doe, significantly.

"He? Oh—well, take him on board the Sea Spider," said Redfern, aloud, and then he added, in sinister tones, so low that only his mate heard him, "and to-night we'll tie him in a bag with a weight at his heels, and quietly drop him overboard when the watch ain't looking!"

"You offered me ten thousand dollars to put an end to him for you," said Doe, wickedly, "and I'll keep my word with you—to-night he will die!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE BOY IN THE BAG.

Both Ned Harland, and Rose Ringold were taken on board of the Sea Spider and hustled into Tom Redfern's cabin; the sailors from the sloop found no one else on the schooner, and fastened together, the two yachts drifted on with the tide.

They were about half a mile away from the Floating Gold Mine on which Ned's crew had been left when the cannibal chief had stolen the Jumping Jenny, and in the current which revolved around the little Sargasso Sea, where the island had been floating a century past.

His pistol taken from him, his hands bound behind his back, and Redfern's threat to throw him overboard when night came on, enveloped in a weighted bag, Ned was in a pitiable plight indeed.

But he did not lose courage as he sat down in a chair and turned the situation over in his mind.

Rose was sobbing, as if her heart would break, beside him. "Come, come," said the boy, cheerily, though it pained him to witness the pretty girl's grief. "Cheer up, Rosie. You needn't be alarmed over the affair. Redfern ain't going to hurt you."

"But he may kill you!" sobbed Rose, brokenly.

"He may try. Of course the case looks bad for our party,

with the yacht, you and I in his power; but my faithful crew will not idly submit to our seizure, you can depend."

"What could they do, so far away on the floating island?"

"Oh, you take too gloomy a view of matters. That wound on your neck, caused by the sucker of the octopus, makes you fretful and morbid. Have courage—I ain't a bit afraid."

"Hark! Some one is coming," said the girl, holding up her hand.

"It is Redfern! Now don't let him see you weeping."

The cabin door opened and Tom Redfern walked in, with a scowl on his dark face, glared at Ned and the girl and flung himself in a chair.

"Well, my respected cousin," said he, sneeringly, as he fastened a malignant glance upon the honest blue eyes of Ned, "I did not expect to have the pleasure of such a sudden meeting with you. But since you have so grossly wronged me, you can expect nothing but the bitterest enmity from me in the future!"

"I'm sure I won't want the friendship of such a cur as you, as the thrashing at Black's Cove, the night I sailed, will testify," said Ned.

Redfern scowled.

He remembered the thrashing Ned gave him.

"You will pay dearly for every blow you dealt me!" he hissed.

"Doubtful," said Ned, shrugging his shoulders indifferently.

"You have been a curse to my life," continued Tom, angrily, "for you always disdained me when you was only an impoverished, ragged brat, living off my father's bounty. Then you outrivalled me in the affections of this girl, doubtless to prey upon the wealth she owns, intrusted to my father. In the end you tried to murder my father and pretended you would wrest his fortune from me, stole my yacht and annoyed me in various ways."

"Indeed?" said Ned, elevating his eyebrows.

"No sarcasm now, curse you!" growled Redfern savagely. "I'll have no nonsense from you since it lies in my power to do as I like. Imagining you had me at a disadvantage, you have, I see, been trying to wrest the wealth from that island; but luck favored me. Your infernal crew will remain there, or the savages will kill—"

"I have driven them all from the island," interposed Ned coolly.

"Oh, you have, eh? And found the alleged treasure, too, eh?"

"Exactly so; and I mean to keep it."

"Not if I can get it."

"You can't!"

"I'll try. I'll starve your crew to death on the island. Then I'll go after the gold. In the end this girl will have to marry me, too!"

"I don't believe she will."

"I'll shatter your confidence soon."

"Oh, get out and leave me be! I'm sick of you!"

Redfern frowned, arose and gave Ned a brutal kick.

"Don't be so impudent to your master!" he cried hoarsely, as he raised his fist, "or, by thunder, I'll break your head!"

Rose darted at him, with flashing eyes and an angry face.

"You despicable coward!" she cried, indignantly, "don't hit a helpless boy!"

"Shut up, you jade!" growled Redfern, in ugly tones. "Mind your own business! I don't want any interference from you—d'you hear?"

The girl's pluck was aroused.

She calmly met the lurid gleam in his glance with a look of such supreme contempt that he winced and averted his gaze.

"I see," cuttingly said she, in low tones that sank into him with withering scorn, "that your former gentlemanly bearing was only a shallow mask to hide your real loaferish nature. You seem to have lost all respect for my sex by

insulting me, and have laid bare the craven meanness of your true self."

Redfern turned as pale as death with shame and mortification.

"I forgot myself in wrath," he humbly began, "when——"

"You can't apologize or smooth matters by wincing!" the girl proudly interposed. "I am a lady, Tom Redfern, and don't forget that fact!"

A sullen look crossed the youth's face.

"Very well," he growled. "Since I have the name I'll have the game. You get into your stateroom at once, if you want to avoid trouble."

The girl's cheeks were flushed, and she glanced appealingly at Ned, a defiant, rebellious look in her dusky eyes, but the captive boy nodded.

"Go, Rose," he said; "further talk with this sneaking hound is an insult to you. You need have no fear for me."

The girl obeyed him as docilely as a kitten.

Left alone with Ned, the ugly young captain of the Sea Spider locked the girl in her room, put the key in his pocket and said:

"I will settle my grudge with you to-night, Ned Harland!"

"You may as well do it now," coolly replied the boy, with a smile.

The only answer Redfern deigned to give was a grunt of impatience, and he strode to the door, passed out on deck, and locked Ned in.

The shadows of twilight had fallen upon the grassy sea, but through the dim haze the outlines of the floating island could be discerned ahead, the crew of the Jumping Jenny standing plainly outlined against the dark background of trees and shrubbery.

"Raise the mainsail and jib," ordered Redfern. "Fasten a line to the schooner and take her in tow. Bear along to the south'ard of the isle. Nick Doe, I want to speak to you privately."

While the crew was obeying his commands he drew his mate aside and in suppressed tones of anger, he said:

"You know, I was actually hesitating when it came to murdering Ned Harland? Well, all such sentiment has left me now."

"Then you want me to fix him?" queried Doc, viciously.

"To-night—as we planned—without fail. Who is on watch?"

"Six——"

"Seven, with you?"

"Ay."

"Reduce the number."

"I'll keep only two below."

"Good!"

"And I'll take the trick at the helm."

"You must send the watch up forward."

"I'll put them where they won't see what goes on," said Doe, significantly.

"Then you'll find me in my cabin at seven bells."

"Have you got a bag?"

"Everything necessary. We'll drop him over board."

"I'll be on hand."

"Just as soon as he's gone you'll get my check for \$10,000."

With this evil understanding they separated.

When midnight came the sky grew overcast and objects faded from view as if to favor Tom Redfern's dark plot.

The yachts had drifted within five hundred feet of the island when Redfern's cabin door was opened by Nick Doe, and he entered.

Bound hand and foot, a gag thrust in his mouth to stifle any outcries he might make, Ned laid on the floor, watching his enemies with a keen, questioning look.

Doe had a huge salt bag in his hand.

"I see you've got him helpless!" he chuckled, pointing at Ned.

"He can't stir or speak a syllable," whispered Redfern, whose face was ashen. "He's an easy victim, Nick. Give me the bag."

"Luck's on our side, I think."

"How do you mean?"

"It's as dark as pitch outside and the watch is asleep."

"Asleep?"

"Drugged! I fixed their grog for them."

"Good for you, Doe."

"How about the gal?"

"I've got her locked in her stateroom yet."

They glanced at each other in silence as if wondering which one would pluck up enough courage to begin their rascally operations.

Redfern soon recovered his boldness, though, pointed at Ned, and growled:

"Why don't you tie him in the bag?"

"Oh—yes—of course! Here—help me, you."

Between them they enveloped Ned completely in the sack.

"Hand me those fifteen pound dumb-bells!" cried Redfern.

"Going to shoot him with these things, eh?"

Doe got the weights, and they closed the mouth of the bag and fastened the iron bells to the end with a piece of lanyard.

Then they both lifted Ned from the floor, in the bag, and started for the deck to heave him into the sea.

Not a soul was on deck near the cabin but the quartermaster, and he could only see to steer by watching the compass in the binnacle, the lamps of which were lit.

They hurried to the port bulwark with their burden, and were about to lift the bag when one of the watch came up from below, and seeing the drugged men lying on the deck he ran aft.

Before Redfern was aware of it the man was beside him.

"Mr. Redfern!" he exclaimed.

A startled exclamation burst from Tom's lips, and both he and Doe dropped the bag and got in front of it.

"Wha-wha-what do you want?" stammered the guilty boy.

"The watch on deck's asleep," said the man, amazed at Tom's confusion, and trying hard to see what he and Doe had concealed behind them.

"Then why don't you wake them up?" savagely asked Redfern.

"Why—I thought there might be something wrong with them, and——"

"Oh, get out! Go and arouse the lazy dogs!"

"I did try, but can't do it, sir."

"The deuce! Try again, then. Go on; I'll join you!"

The man walked away, but uneasily glanced back over his shoulder at Redfern, several times, for his peculiar actions had a suspicious look that impressed him with an idea of foul play.

The moment he was out of sight Redfern grasped the bag.

"Over with him, Doe—quick!" he whispered, "before that nosey fool returns! He suspects something wrong."

"How are you going to account for Harland's disappearance to the crew?"

"Say he must have jumped overboard and escaped. Hurry—hurry!"

They grasped the bag again, swung it upon the bulwark, and, giving it a push, they sent it flying down toward the water.

Then they both ran forward toward the sleeping watch, afraid to look back at the spot where Ned had disappeared, for their crime made cowards of them.

CHAPTER XII.

THE GIANT TURTLE.

All through his trying ordeal Ned had been sensible of what was going on, and the feeling of horror that assailed him was extreme when he found that he was doomed to be drowned.

Unable to help himself, made the situation worse, and he passively had to submit to his fate.

As his body shot down toward the water he inwardly groaned, for only a few seconds were between himself and eternity.

Expecting to feel the cold, weedy water strike him, he was amazed to suddenly get, instead, a thump on the side that almost knocked the breath out of him, and his descent was checked.

"Murder!" hissed a voice, in muffled tones of alarm. "What's that?"

"A cannon ball!" said another person softly.

"Look out!" added another, "it's capsizing the canoe!"

There came a lurch of the object Ned landed on—a splash—another violent swaying, and then the truth dawned upon the boy.

"I've fallen across a canoe that must have been riding beneath the spot where Redfern and his mate dropped me overboard."

The occupants of the dug-out had been flung in the water by the shock, but, fortunately for Ned, the bag he was in had become so wedged in the canoe that he held there.

The ones who were dumped in the water scrambled back into the boat and the quartermaster of the Sea Spider thought he heard their suppressed voices, but, not seeing them, he wasn't sure.

"Why—it's a bag!" said the first one to regain the boat.

"And there's something mighty big in it," added the next one.

"Let's open it and see what it is," suggested the third.

This was done, and when they felt Ned's body, they all became alarmed.

"A corpse!" gasped one.

"It's a murder!" hinted the second.

"Heave it in the water!" the third muttered.

"Hold on!" said the first speaker. "The fellow's alive yet. Poor wretch, and he's gagged and tied, hand and foot. I'll free him."

The moment this was done Ned sat up, exclaiming:

"Thank God, Tom Redfern is balked again! Don't you know me, fellows? I'm Ned. You've saved your captain."

They were three of Ned's own crew.

Having found one of the dug-outs on the floating island that belonged to the savages whom they had driven away, the boys had set out for the yacht, guided by its lights, to venture trying to gain possession of the captive Jumping Jenny.

The canoe was scarcely big enough to hold more than the three boys who manned her.

When Ned explained what happened, and they unfolded their plan, the little captain was delighted at the project.

"There isn't a soul on the schooner," said the boy, "and we can easily get on board, cut the hawser by which the Sea Spider is towing her, raise some canvas and get away to the island. There we can take the rest of the boys on board, return to the sloop, give the villains a good thrashing, and rescue Miss Ringold."

The canoe had been left far astern of the yachts by this time, but they paddled after them and soon caught up to the Jumping Jenny, when they boarded her at the martingale stay.

Having had his boys prepare all the sails for hoisting, Ned went up in the bow, with a knife in his hand, to cut the hawser, when he heard Redfern on the other yacht exclaiming, in the gloom:

"It is strange to me how half the crew is so soundly asleep that we can't awaken them. Have they been drinking?"

"The liar!" muttered Ned, recalling to mind what Nick Doe told Redfern, just before they tossed him overboard. "He knows very well that his mate drugged the watch with the view of concealing their base operations on me from them."

"Well," said the sailor to whom Redfern was talking, "they all had an allowance of grog this evening, but no more than usual."

"How many are left awake?"

"You, Roe, the quartermaster, I and two men below—six in all," said the sailor, and Redfern replied, carelessly:

"Oh, well, you can go below and turn in. It's nothing but the liquor that's got the best of them, and they'll sleep it off."

Just then one of Ned's friends joined him.

"Why don't you cut the rope?" he asked, in a whisper.

"Because I've changed my mind," replied the boy, guardedly.

"Ain't you going to save the schooner?"

"Yes. I just heard a conversation showing me that we can tackle the enemy and stop their nonsense by making prisoners of them. Both yachts will then be in my possession. Instead of trying to tow the Floating Gold Mine away, I can load the two boats with the gold and abandon the island."

The two others were told about the way matters stood, and eagerly expressed their willingness to attack Redfern's crew.

Having laid out the work for each one to pursue, and had his friends arm themselves from the munitions on board the schooner, Ned said to them:

"We must not fail in this fight. You all know that the schooner was only provisioned for a week. Our food and water supply is now nearly exhausted. But there is plenty on the Sea Spider, which we must get, or we'll soon find ourselves in great trouble."

"They won't be able to whip us if once we get on their decks," replied one of the boys. "There are four of us to their six. The rest are helplessly drugged. Out of the six, one is the helmsman, who can't very well leave his wheel with the sails set, so he will be useless. Then, three of them will be below. That will leave only Redfern, Doe and the quartermaster on deck—three in all, but only two able to fight us four."

"True," smiled Ned; "and if you lock the fellows down in the forecabin while we are engaging Redfern, Doe and the quartermaster, we will be evenly matched. Now, boys, get hold of the hawser and pull away with a will. We can drag the Jumping Jenny close up to the stern of the Sea Spider and make her fast there, get on the other boat and in a few minutes make our attempt to win a conquest."

The hawser was untied and hauled in.

The schooner glided up to the sloop, and when her long bowsprit almost touched the taffrail of the Sea Spider they fastened the cable and crept out on the foot-ropes.

From the end of the bowsprit to the stern of the sloop was but a short jump for the nimble young sailors, and one after the other they leaped upon the enemy's deck.

One of the boys dashed up to the quartermaster, startling him out of his wits, pointed a pistol at his head and threatened to fire if he dared resist arrest or utter an outcry.

Another boy rushed across the deck to the forecabin companionway, slammed the double doors shut and bolted them.

And Ned, with the other boy, ran for Tom Redfern and Nick Doe, who stood at the lee shrouds discussing the success of their plan.

Both of the young rascals were dumfounded with surprise.

In fact, so unexpected, quick and well executed was the attack that it was a glorious success from the beginning.

"Tom Redfern, hold up your dirty hands!" said Ned.

"You, too, Nick Doe!" added Ned's friend.

And they both aimed their revolvers at the amazed boys.

"Ned Harland or his ghost!" gasped Redfern, turning pale, for the lanterns on deck plainly revealed the boy's identity.

"By gosh, we're done for!" ejaculated Doe, aghast.

They didn't fancy the gleam of the pistols, and held up their hands.

"Fool! I'm no ghost. Your attempt to kill me failed, that's all!" said Ned, contemptuously. "The tables are turned. You are my prisoner now, and I've got possession of both yachts."

Redfern began to swear violently.

He saw how matters were tending at last, and it infuriated him to the verge of madness.

"Let me have a pistol!" he raved, his eyes bulging and his whole form quivering. "Let me have an even chance. I'll fight a duel with you. I'll end this fight forever!"

"I'll do nothing of the kind," replied Ned coldly. "You will simply march down into the fore-castle with that friend of yours, or I'll boot you all the way there!"

With a crestfallen air the defeated rogues were driven down into the fore-castle, with the quartermaster, to join the rest of his crew, and Ned's victory was complete.

Great was Rosie's joy when she was awakened, liberated from her stateroom, and told about the situation.

The Sea Spider was then sailed to the Floating Gold Mine and the two yachts were hove to and moored beside it amid the wild hurrahs of Ned's crew.

By drugging part of his crew to carry out his evil designs on Ned, the captain of the Sea Spider had simply thrown himself in the power of Harland, falling, virtually, into his own trap!

None of the boys got much sleep that night.

The next day dawned, hazy and rainy, but it did not defer Ned's plans any, for he set his boys to work dividing the provisions on the Sea Spider with the Jumping Jenny, and the casks of both vessels were filled with water from the holds of the old galleons.

Having attended to this Ned had the ballast taken out of both yachts, and the work commenced of putting in a cargo of gold instead of it, in each yacht.

Several days were required to do this properly, however, and in the meantime, during off hours, the crew roamed all over the strange island, attentively examining it.

No stranger freak of nature could have happened.

There was an abundance of tropical fruit on the trees and bushes, a turfy grass, and everywhere lay evidences of the savages having lived there a long time, in the form of pottery, rude huts, war implements and extinct fires, where they cooked their food.

There was a hollow square in the middle of the island, formed in the manner in which the galleons were fastened together, the grassy water in it forming a pool in which they did their fishing.

Ned and Rose were standing on the edge of it at mid-day, discussing their future movements, when the girl observed a commotion down in the square pool beneath.

Instantly her curiosity was aroused, and she stepped nearer to the edge and peered down.

"Look, Ned—a monster turtle!" she exclaimed, pointing at a large, oblong object, darkly outlined in the weed.

The boy glanced over.

"What a treat it would make for a meal!" he observed.

"Can't you catch it?"

"I'm afraid not. They are vicious things to handle in the water."

Just then the turf broke from under Rosie's feet, and down she fell, headlong, into the pool, uttering a shriek.

"Lord!" gasped Ned, in startled tones.

"Save me!" screamed the girl as she struck the water in front of the enormous turtle. "Ned, Ned, I'll drown!"

Her dress held her up an instant, and the boy might have saved her from going under, but just then the turtle snapped at her dress and caught it in its powerful beak.

It might have released its hold a moment later and disappeared in affright had not Ned sprang into the water after the girl, for she could not swim.

The splash of his body alarmed the big sea turtle, however, and, never relaxing its clutch, it dove down in the depths and dragged the terrified girl beneath the surface with it.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LEAP FOR LIFE.

The peril Rose Ringold was in might not have been so great had it occurred in clear water, but the grassy sea was not only hard to swim in, but held objects down and tangled things in its meshes.

Ned did not pause to think of this when he dove in after her.

All the daring boy had in view was the fear that she would perish after the giant turtle dragged her beneath the surface of the pool.

He dove down after her.

It was utterly impossible to see beneath the surface as in clear water, besides which an oppressive weight seemed to hold him down.

Then he ascended to the surface.

No sign of the girl was to be seen in the square pool made by the framing of the four galleons, and he dove down deeper again.

It was like groping in the dark.

Again unable to do anything, the boy arose.

Still no sign of the girl, and with the horrible conviction firmly impressed on his mind that the girl was lost, the boy paddled around for fully five minutes, and then swam to the side of a galleon.

"Poor Rosie!" he groaned. "She must be dead. No human being could live under water so long. This is terrible—terrible!"

Ned felt awfully downhearted and ready to cry, for in his boyish way he thought a good deal of the pretty, dark-haired girl.

There were some roots and vines festooning the side of the galleon, which he grasped, and by their aid he climbed up on the island again.

His friends were scattered all over the floating gold mine, some of them hoisting the gold out of one of the galleons, and getting it ready to stow in the two yachts moored close by.

He lingered beside the treacherous pool a while longer, vainly hoping to see some sign of the unfortunate girl, against his conviction that she was drowned, and then sauntered over to the Jumping Jenny.

His heart was full of grief over the accident, and he did not say a word to any one about it, but went on board the yacht to retire to his cabin and give way to his woe.

He heard the imprisoned crew of the Sea Spider cutting up high jinks on board of the sloop, yelling, swearing, singing and hooting in the fore-castle, and a grim look stole over his face.

"If Tom Redfern hadn't abducted Poor Rosie from Black's

Cove this horrible accident could have happened," he muttered, "and——"

But just then he heard a strange sound that startled him. It was a plaintive, wailing cry, almost unearthly, and seemed to rise from the sea, and he rushed to the bulwarks and peered over.

Clinging to a rope that trailed over the side of the yacht was a huddled-up figure—the form of a girl—of Rose!

With a yell, a jump and a dive, Ned went overboard.

And at one grab he had her in his arm!

He was just in time, for her waning strength was most all gone, and she was in momentary danger of falling back in the sea.

Within a minute the boy went up the rope to the deck, with the half-senseless girl, and in another minute he had her in his cabin lying on the lounge, and was pouring brandy down her throat to revive her faculties and strength.

But he never could tell afterwards how he summoned up strength enough to carry the girl as he did.

She soon recovered, and sat up.

"Rose! Rose!" cried the happy boy. "Oh, I am so glad you are all right, after giving you up for dead."

"Dear Ned," returned the girl affectionately, as the tears streamed from her dark eyes. "It all seems like some terrible dream!"

"How under heaven did you get out on the open sea, after sinking in the inclosure between the galleons?" demanded the amazed boy.

"You ask me a question I cannot answer positively," the girl replied, "but I know that the turtle dragged me beneath the surface, and then everything became a blank to me. When my reason came back partly, I found myself clinging to the rope and my strength nearly all gone. That is all I know, Ned."

"There is only one explanation to the mystery," said the boy. "The turtle must have dragged you under one of the galleons, and you came up, released, near the rope. Groping about in your dying frenzy, as all drowning people do, you must have grasped the rope, which happened to be in reach, and held it until I found you there."

The girl retired to her room and changed her clothes, Ned doing the same thing, and as Rose was prostrated by the shock, Ned left her lying in the cabin and went out to attend to the work.

By nightfall one of the galleons was emptied of its gold, and the precious metal was stowed on board of the Jumping Jenny.

It freighted the schooner heavily, but she could stand it.

"Mebbe 'tain't an' mebbe 'tis right o' me to mention it, sir," said the grumpy old Ralph Hooker, hopping up to Ned at dusk, as the boy stood ashore near the Sea Spider, "but I reckon how sumpin's got ter be did wi' them blasted lubbers aboard o' that 'ere craft."

"What's the matter with you now, Ralph?" asked Ned, grinning at the way the surly old mariner's good eye was rolling, while the glass one stared straight ahead with a hard, stony glare.

Hooker pulled his whiskers.

He always did this when he was mad.

"If you hadn't a-got yer chokin' irons abaft o' ther windpipe o' my bulldog ashore," he growled, "I'd like nuthin' better'n settin' him adrift among them swabs. Looker me. Whar's my leg?"

Ned glanced down at him, and saw that his wooden leg was gone.

"Why, you're stranded almost, ain't you?" he laughed.

"Stranded, hey?" roared the old sea dog, with a double-barreled glare shooting out of his stationary eye. "Waal, not yet, by gol. Them 'ere swabs hez garn an' taken it, sir—

yes, sir, hooked my leg when I went down ter give 'em their rations jist now."

"That's too bad, Ralph. How did it happen?"

"Some o' Redfern's spite. He sot 'em on ter me."

"It's just like the brute."

"Wery likely. I'm true blue, I am. That's why I got keel-hauled."

"Indeed! What happened you, anyway?"

"Wouldn't jine 'em to escape."

"Eh?" demanded Ned in startled tones.

"Aye, now, that's jest it, by ther powers o' Neptune, sir, I ain't ter be bought."

"So they wanted to bribe you to aid their escape?"

"Jist wot they perposed. I refoosed. Then they sot on me hard."

"Good for you, Ralph. You are reforming, I see."

"Oh, I told 'em I'd make more by stickin' ter you an' a-gittin' my share o' this treasure," confessed Hooker.

"So you will, you sordid old vagabond. Where's your leg?"

"They've got it, busted open a port hole with it, an' one o' 'em clumb out a winder ter git up on deck ter unlock ther door o' ther companionway, so's ter git ther rest out."

Ned started.

"A revolt—a break for liberty, eh?" he asked eagerly.

"Reckon it be. Looker thar. Ain't that one o' them?"

He pointed at a man who went up the bobstay of the Sea Spider, out of the water, gained the bulwarks and leaped on deck.

Not a soul was near to stop him.

With one spring Ned reached the deck, and dashing across it with great agility he pounced down on the sailor just as he was in the act of unlocking the companionway door, which Hooker had taken the precaution to fasten after him.

"Hold on! No, you don't!" cried the boy.

"Dash me if you'll prevent it!" snarled the man.

He was much bigger and stronger than the courageous boy, and seizing Ned he tried to throw him down.

Ned clung to him with a grip of iron, though.

"Help! Help!" he shouted, knowing that he could not cope with the man.

"Shut up!" hissed the other. "Keep still or I'll kill you!"

"Murder!" roared Ralph Hooker on shore, as he hopped up and down on his solitary leg. "All han's aloft! All han's on deck!"

Through the shrubbery came a number of Ned's crew at a rush, alarmed at the tremendous uproar.

The escaped sailor saw them.

If he wanted to liberate his anxiously waiting messmates he had no time to lose, for the crew of the Jumping Jenny would get on the sloop within a few moments.

With savage fury he clutched Ned by the throat with both of his brawny hands, shoved out his bent knee, and dragged the boy over it backward until his spine was fairly curved.

Then, with a sudden movement he sent Ned spinning over backward, and relaxing his hold as the boy described a circle in the air, he sent him flat on his back on the deck.

For an instant Ned was dazed.

Before he could recover himself the man unlocked the door of the companionway, and out shot Tom Redfern.

The next instant Billy Roe, the first mate of the schooner, reached the sailor, and dealt him a blow in the face with his clenched fist that knocked him reeling backward.

He pitched into the open companionway.

His messmates were all huddled there.

But he knocked them down the stairs.

And fell down on top of them.

A fearful uproar arose.

Before any more of them could get out, Billy slammed the door shut, and locked it, while Ned sprang to his feet.

Redfern saw how badly his plot was ending, and observing that it was impossible to get past Ned's friends on the island, he rushed to the shrouds and mounted them.

"Come back here!" shouted Ned, running after him.

"Never! You won't lock me in there again!" yelled Redfern defiantly.

He dashed up the ratlines to the masthead, with Ned at his heels, and gaining the spreaders of the topmast shrouds, he made an attempt to climb up the varnished topmast.

It was too slippery, though, and he slid down again.

Just then Ned reached the masthead.

Redfern saw him, went around the foot of the topmast in a twinkling, and retreating out on the spreader on the other side he got his legs astride of it, and grasped the topmast shroud.

"You may as well give it up!" he hissed. "I won't be taken back!" and he fastened a malignant glance upon Ned.

"You'll have to. You can't escape from this vessel!"

"Then if they imprison me I'll give 'em a reason to do it."

He jerked his revolver out of his pocket as he spoke, and cocking it he took deliberate aim at Ned's heart.

The little captain did not have a defensive weapon.

"Say your prayers," continued Redfern. "I'm going to fire at you."

"If you do my friends will hang you!" replied Ned.

"I'm desperate! I'm reckless! I don't care a curse what they do!"

He looked wild—demented—with passion, and Ned saw at once that he was beyond reason or sense.

For a moment he did not know what to do, and his glance wandered away, and rested on the jib-stay below him.

"Look out! I'm going to fire!" admonished Redfern.

And bang! went his weapon.

At the same moment Ned sprang for the jib-stay.

It was a leap for life.

He uttered a smothered exclamation, as his body left the spreader and shot through the air; and the anxious crew looking up from the deck below fairly groaned as they saw him jump.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN ELECTRICAL TERROR.

The jib-stay was fastened at the masthead, and ran down to the end of the bowsprit; and as Ned sprang for it his body shot through the air like a cannon ball.

As he was descending past the stay, he flung out his hands, and they closed on a wire cable, and it arrested his fall.

The shock nearly jerked his arms from their sockets, but there he hung, his body swaying like a clock pendulum.

Had he not jumped just in the nick of time Redfern's shot would have killed him; and the reason he took the desperate leap was because there was no other means by which he could have escaped the assassin's bullet.

But escape it he did, and down the stay he went, hand under hand to the bowsprit, whence he made his way in on deck.

Several of his crew had their pistols pointed at Redfern.

"Don't fire at him, boys," he exclaimed, holding up his hand.

"Are you all right?" asked Billy Roe, anxiously.

"Haven't got as much as a scratch."

"We thought it was all up with you, sir."

"And you were going to shoot Redfern to avenge me, eh?"

"Aye, sir—or, if he leveled his weapon to fire at you again!"

"I was well protected."

"The lubber saw it and didn't dare to fire the second shot!"

Ned glanced up at Redfern, and saw that his face was pale as death, with fear for his life.

"I'll dislodge him!" exclaimed Ned, and he shouted: "Redfern!"

"Well, what do you want?" snarled Tom.

"Come down here, before we riddle you with bullets."

"I won't!"

"Aim at him, boys!"

All the sailors who had weapons pointed them at Redfern.

"Stop!" he yelled frantically. "Don't shoot!"

"Will you come down, or not?"

"Oh, Lord, yes! I'll come down! I'll come down!"

And down he came scrambling in hot haste, amid the risive laughter of Ned's boys, a mortified look on his face. They locked him down in the forecabin again.

The next day the work of transferring the gold from galleons to the Sea Spider was resumed, Ned seeing at glance that all the gold in the two remaining ships could comfortably stowed away in the hold of the sloop.

By nightfall one of the galleons was unladen.

The last one to be stripped of its precious cargo was that to which the Sea Spider was moored; and at nightfall Ned made his way on board of it alone with a lantern, to plot out the easiest method of unshipping it.

It was a beautiful moonlight night, and the boy glanced around to take in the charming scene, as he imagined it might be the last night of their stay at the island.

For miles around glinted the billows of the clear ocean; a few solitary sea gulls sweeping the azure sky like black specks.

Through the green verdure of the island glowed the campfires of the sailor boys at one side, and the rattling strains of a banjo rang out accompanied by a jolly sea song in the voice of a good singer.

A soft, gentle breeze stirred the foliage, arousing a subtle fragrance delightful to the senses, and the moving of the yachts at their moorings made the blocks and rigging creak and groan while the island's base was lapped by breaking waves.

Ned was of a poetical nature, and delighted in anything of this kind; but it was to cost him dear to then give way to the magic influence of the romantic scene.

His back was turned toward the sloop yacht, and so deep engrossed were his thoughts he did not observe a number of dark figures lurking in the shadows near him.

The prisoners of the Sea Spider had found a means of getting out through the window lighting the forecabin, which Ned had neglected to secure, and several of them were lying concealed around him, with Redfern's orders to capture him.

"We can use him as a hostage," the young rascal said, "and threaten to murder him before his crew's eyes if he don't let us sail away unmolested."

Perfectly ignorant of his danger, Ned finally came to realization of what he wanted to do, and picking up his lantern he descended into the old galleon.

It was dark, silent and gloomy there, only the dull splashing of the waves against the planks outside breaking the stillness.

The boy fastened his lantern to a hook, and as its dull rays were reflected around the huge hold a curious picture was presented.

The hold was filled with water four feet deep.

But the light of the lantern penetrating it showed a bottom filled with oozing, slimy mud and sand, in which were imbedded a few sodden planks, pieces of rusty iron, and here and there a dark, shapeless mass of black objects projected.

Discolored and repulsive as they appeared, yet they were crude bars of virgin gold worth thousands of dollars.

To get at them, as in the case of the other cargoes, it was necessary to wade in the water, pry them out of their muddy bed, and hoist them to the open air with a tackle and fall.

Ned had on an old pair of pants, shoes, and a jacket, in which to wade through the water in order to prospect and learn by feeling about how much of the gold there was in the place.

He went in up to his armpits, and swam across to the middle, where he climbed up on a heap of rubbish to investigate it, when a slight noise over at the hatchway he just left attracted his attention, and by the light of the lantern he saw a number of men come down the ladder rather swiftly into the hold.

First he thought they were some of his crew.

But they wore dark blue uniforms.

He started.

A second glance betrayed all.

They were some of Tom Redfern's men!

"By jingo!" he gasped. "They've escaped again!"

Down came the men, until six of them were in the place, and Ned remained perfectly quiet, thinking that they did not know he was there. They soon undeceived him, however.

His figure, rising out of the water in the gloom, was vaguely outlined by the rays of the lantern.

Redfern was with his men, and he pointed at Ned.

"There he stands!" he shouted, pointing to the boy.

His words gave Ned to understand that they were in pursuit of him, and as he realized that he was all alone, unaided and unarmed, in the depths of that gloomy, forbidding place, where no one could hear his cries, surrounded by enemies who would not hesitate to murder him, a feeling of horror swept over him.

"They are tracking me down here," he muttered. "They mean to tackle me. No doubt they are all armed. Their numbers would overpower me, if nothing else. What am I to do now?"

He shuddered and cast a wild glance around.

There was not an opening by which he could escape except the hatchway by which ingress had been made.

But far back toward the stern he beheld a small platform. It would be more favorable for him to reach it and have solid footing when the attack came than to remain where he was, and he plunged into the water and swam for it as fast as he could go.

"There he goes! He is swimming away! Go after him!" exclaimed Redfern, the moment Ned beat a retreat.

And showing an example, Tom struck out after his cousin, followed by his five friends, with a persistence that showed the hunted boy that they meant to get him in their clutches. Fortunately Ned had a good start of them.

Besides, he was a splendid swimmer, and he swiftly covered the intervening distance, and reached the platform.

It was only a foot above the level of the water.

But just as he was about to seize it something was hurled at and hit him, and he fell back gasping, as if struck by lightning.

It was an iron bolt flung by one of his enemies.

For the space of an instant it seemed as if he was paralyzed, every nerve tingled, and every muscle was benumbed.

He sank beneath the water, revived, arose, and then made a quick clutch at the platform and drew himself up on it.

It occupied several minutes for the boy to entirely recover from the shock; but when he did he saw his enemies so close to the platform that in a minute more they would get on it.

The top of the platform was littered with pieces of old water-soaked timber, and he picked up a piece of it, and as the hands of Redfern clutched at the edge of the platform

he brought his novel weapon down on his fingers with crushing force.

"Ouch!" yelled Redfern, dropping back in the water in agony, "he has smashed my hands to a jelly!"

"I'll break your head next time!" cried Ned, realizing at once he had gained an advantage by being where he was.

The other five men drew near, but the moment they made an attempt to clamber up to where Ned was he slammed the timber down upon them, battering their hands, arms and heads with such fury that they had to retreat.

The boy thus held them at bay; but how long it would last he did not know, as they were liable to find a means to outwit him, confined as he was in so small a space.

The men swam away again, and reaching the ladder at the hatchway they went up and vanished.

Ned imagined that they had gone away.

But only to be dashed again.

His hopes revived.

For the men came down the ladder and clung to it, one below the other.

They had armed themselves with pistols by some means unknown to the boy, and as soon as their eyes became accustomed to the gloom, and they dimly made out the figure of Ned, they opened fire upon him.

"Heavens!" gasped Ned in alarm, as a shower of bullets went whistling by, dangerously close to him. "What shall I do? Is there no escape for me?"

He ran across the old platform in a panic.

There sounded an ominous crash as he did so beneath his feet.

The supports of the platform broke.

Then down it went.

An instant later Ned was thrown into the water, and silence deep and impressive reigned in the gloomy hold.

CHAPTER XV.

ROSIE'S PERIL.

Ned's danger was brought to a sudden and unexpected end when the platform broke and he was precipitated into the water.

Tom Redfern and his five sailors were at that moment getting out of the galleon's hold.

The boy swam for the wall, when something struck him a violent blow in the face, and he uttered a cry, thinking for an instant that he had been hit by a pistol shot.

He was soon undeceived, however.

It proved to be the platform upon which he had been standing, and which had broken down under the weight of his body.

Eagerly he grasped it, and drew himself up on the old planks, which, rotten and dry from old age, floated on the water.

He saw Redfern and his friends hurry up through the opening to the top of the floating gold mine.

"Now if the crew of the Jumping Jenny sight them they'll give the rascals a good thrashing, and lock them down in the forecabin of the Sea Spider again!" muttered Ned.

He ripped a piece of plank from the edge of the raft, paddled it over to the opening, and ascended to the surface of the island, perfectly satisfied with his investigation of the gold.

It was the last galleon they would have to unload to store the gold on board of the Sea Spider, and he thought that the water could be overcome by using the yacht's pumps on the hold and leaving the place dry.

When he got up on top of the island with the lantern, the

beautiful moonlight aspect of the scene had not changed, the camp fires still glowed on the shore, surrounded by the boys, and all was quiet.

Tom Redfern and his sailors had vanished from sight somewhere, and Ned ran up to his friends, startling them with:

"Boys, the prisoners on the Sea Spider have escaped again!"

Every one of the startled boys sprang to their feet.

"Escaped?" echoed Billy Roe.

"Yes; and are on this island somewhere."

"That's bad! What shall we do?"

"All of you scatter, and try to chase them out of their place of concealment. Once we get them in our power, we will tie them up so they can't get away again."

This plan was partly carried out, Ned's crew dispersing all over the island in different directions, and Rose coming ashore.

An hour was vainly spent beating the bushes for their enemies, but not a trace of them was found.

When Ned met his mate, he exclaimed:

"They must be on board of one of the yachts, Billy."

"Suppose we go back and see."

"Very well—but—"

"But what?" demanded Bill, as Ned paused.

"Look there!" gasped the boy, turning pale as he pointed out over the moonlit sea. "There goes the Jumping Jenny!"

"Good Lord! It must be that Redfern is stealing her!" cried Billy, as he saw the schooner under full swing bearing away from the island with a free wind to the eastward.

"Yes," disgustedly returned Ned. "While we have all been searching the land for them, they must have returned to the unguarded schooner and set sail."

"And the Jumping Jenny has a full cargo of gold, while the Sea Spider is only half laden," said Billy.

"Redfern knew what he was about in choosing the boat with the most gold on it," bitterly said Ned. "Still, as we must pursue him to recapture her, and the Sea Spider is lighter than the schooner, she will sail faster in this grassy sea, thus giving us an advantage over Redfern."

All the boys were called on board the sloop and apprised of the situation of affairs, whereat they became furious.

The hawsers were cast off, and the huge mainsail and jib were hoisted, Ned grasped the wheel, and parting company with the Floating Gold Mine, the yacht started off in pursuit of the schooner, upon whose deck Ned saw Redfern and all his crew.

The breeze had been freshening and bellied out the canvas until it seemed on the point of bursting through the lazy jacks, and although the Sea Spider gradually began to gain on the Jumping Jenny, she did not sail fast enough to suit Ned.

"Crack on the spinnaker and club topsail!" he shouted to the boys. "The wind is free, and Redfern has got the schooner's canvas wing-a-wing. Step lively, boys, step lively, now, and we will soon overhaul her!"

Away ran the nimble sailors to obey this order, when Ned suddenly recalled Rosie to mind, and asked Billy hastily.

"Where is Miss Ringold?"

"I don't know," blankly replied the little mate.

"See if she isn't on board."

"Aye, aye, sir!" said Billy, saluting and hurrying away.

The gravest fears beset Ned's mind, for in the excitement of suddenly giving chase to Redfern he had quite forgotten the girl, and it did not occur to him until that moment that she might not be on the yacht.

Within a few minutes Billy returned, a scared look on his face.

"The girl isn't on board, sir!" he exclaimed.

Ned started, an uneasy look mantling his features

"Not aboard?" he muttered. "Then she has either been left on the island, or else Redfern has got her on the schooner."

Ned felt low spirited over the matter, and as the sails swayed out to the breeze, and the sloop forged ahead faster, he said:

"Should I find that Redfern has offered her any indignity I'll make the beggar sweat for it when we meet!"

Away dashed the Sea Spider, under the extra pressure canvas, cutting through the thick sea weed like a knife, and the island was left several miles astern.

Redfern had followed Ned's example by raising the topsails and in spite of the heavy freight burdening the Jumping Jenny she made rapid headway, flying from the sloop.

Tom Redfern was thoroughly at home on the schooner, he knew exactly how to handle her to develop her utmost speed, as Ned Harland discovered to his disgust, and a stern race was begun that threatened to be a long one.

Another obstacle was soon overcome that retarded the speed of the yachts; they presently left the grassy sea, and were bounding out in clear water, where they made better speed.

Ned glanced back at the Floating Gold Mine, and with a start he bent a keener glance upon it.

"Smoke and flame arising from one of the old galleons!" he muttered. "By jingo, Redfern must have set fire to one of the old ships before he fled, and if Rosie has been left behind she may perish in the flames! Oh, where is she?"

Within a few moments every one on the yacht saw that a portion of the floating island was on fire.

"The rest of the gold we left there will sink to the bottom now," said Billy, regretfully. "Confound Redfern, I say!"

Old Ralph Hooker gave a surly grunt.

"Oughter be satisfied if it is so, as if we saves ther cargo o' both o' these yachts it 'll make all uv us rich," he growled, but he stumped uneasily up and down the deck on his wooden pin, pulling his gray whiskers, rolling his good eye, and gnawing savagely at a mouthful of navy plug he was chewing.

Within an hour the Sea Spider overhauled the schooner, and as she ran up alongside of the Jumping Jenny, down came the spinnaker, and she swung around and collided with the schooner.

Ned's boys were ready with grapnels, and although Redfern and his crew were all prepared to repel boarders, Ned linked the two yachts together, and thus retarded, they swung up in the wind.

Both crews were fully armed, and abandoning the wheel, Ned ran to the front of his crew, and shouted:

"Redfern, you'll have to give in, or take the consequences."

"Upstart fool!" scornfully shouted Tom, shaking his clenched fist at Ned. "Do you imagine that we are afraid of you?"

"You have attempted to steal my property."

"Then try to get it back!"

"You mean to fight?"

"To the bitter end!"

"Fire on them, boys!" cried Ned to his crew.

Their rifles were loaded with bird shot, and they poured a volley of the stinging pellets in upon Redfern's crew, while the rascals did not expect, and scattering them they saw them rushing pell mell all over the deck, seeking safety in places where they would no longer remain exposed.

The shot had wounded many of them, not fatally, but painfully, and although Redfern yelled to them to hold their ground and return the fire they would not obey him.

In truth, Redfern was amazed at the shots.

He did not think Ned would dare to shoot at his men.

But upon seeing his advantage, the boy uttered a ringing command to his crew to charge upon the enemy, and with wild cheer the boys went clambering over the bulwarks upon the deck of the Jumping Jenny, and singling out an opponent apiece, they rushed upon the demoralized fugitives.

Redfern's crew were afraid to shoot, as such a serious affair was alarming to them in the extreme, and upon seeing the flying down their weapons, Ned shouted:

"Drive them down in the forecandle at the points of your files!"

The boys complied.

Every one of their rifles were unloaded after the first discharge.

Of course Redfern's crew did not know it, but they imagined that their lives were in danger and fled with cries of alarm.

"Defeated! Defeated!" howled Redfern upon seeing this.

"You never can get the best of me!" laughed Ned, running up to him. "I am your master now, Tom Redfern!"

The young rascal raised a rifle he carried by the barrel to deal Ned a blow with it, in his mortification and rage.

But before he could swing it out shot Ned's fist, catching him squarely in the eye, and knocked him sprawling on the deck.

He and his crew were all bound hand and foot, confined in the hold, and after Ned divided his crew so that half could work the Jumping Jenny under Billy Roe's command, a search was made for the missing Rosie Ringold.

But she wasn't on board of the schooner!

Ned was filled with unutterable horror.

"She must be upon the burning island!" he cried. "Up with all sail, boys, and let us race back there to save her, the fire has not already killed the unfortunate girl."

And with every inch of canvas spread that the rigging could hold, the two yachts tacked back for the burning island with the speed of racers to save the girl.

But would they get there in time?

CHAPTER XVI.

FOUND FLOATING.

The Sea Spider being the lightest laden of the two yachts soon left the Jumping Jenny hull down astern, and made fourteen knots an hour, as the breeze by this time was blowing strong.

Several hours had passed since they left the floating island, and a great lump seemed to rise up in Ned's throat as he thought that it was more than time enough in which the oldalleons could be consumed by the flames.

Still he kept on, and in due course of time hove in sight of the Floating Gold Mine—that is, all there was left of it, for the fire had spread over the four rotten old ships, gutting them entirely.

The hulks were burned to the water's edge, he saw by the aid of his spyglass, and the earth and shrubbery had sunk down on top of what remained of the ancient shells until it now laid like a ruined mat on the surface of the sea.

As the Sea Spider ranged up closer to the ruin, from which dense cloud of smoke and flames were yet pouring skyward, the end of it sank down under water.

It remained that way for a few moments, then the entire mass plunged into the sea, and vanished.

That was the end of the floating gold mine.

Thousands of dollars worth of gold were swallowed up in the sea, and not a sign of Rosie was to be seen.

A cry involuntarily burst from every one's lips.

"It's gone forever!" exclaimed Ned.

"May ther cuss o' jingo fall on Redfern fer gettin' it afire!" howled Ralph Hooker, furiously. "Dash me ef he ain't cheated us out o' a king's ransom. Oh, Lordy, I could kill her lubber."

"But where is Rose?" gasped Ned, faintly.

"Reckon she's burnt or drowned!"

"Oh, horrible—horrible!"

"Tain't no use to take on," growled Hooker. "That won't do no good."

Ned sailed the yacht all around the spot where the island had gone down, but there was no trace of the girl to be seen, and when the schooner drew near its crew was apprised of what happened, calling forth their expressions of intense rage.

"The girl must be lost," said Ned reluctantly, after an hour's idle search. "It is useless to look any further. We may as well leave the grassy sea and set sail for Black's Cove. There is nothing to keep us here any longer. The floating gold mine is gone, we have got three-quarters of its treasure stowed in the two boats, and it makes me sick to stay here thinking of what the terrible fate of Rose must have been."

There was at least one tender spot in Hooker's gruff and grumpy nature, for he rubbed his eyes and growled:

"Poor little lass! Poor little lass! It's too bad!"

"Schooner ahoy!" shouted Ned, to those on the Jumping Jenny.

"Ahoy!" came back Billy Roe's voice over the water.

"We're going back to Black's Cove. Follow in our wake."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"Keep a lookout for traces of the missing girl."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"And stay as close to us as you can."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"Now, boys, lower and furl the flying jib, leave stay-sails set, single reef mainsail, and stow away club topsail."

A cheery response came from the sailor boys, and they scattered about the deck, manning halyards and tackles, getting the canvas down and in trim.

Shortened sail was made so that the sloop would not run too far ahead of the schooner, and, getting before the wind, the two yachts made tracks from the spot never to return.

The sun arose an hour later and shed a golden halo over the sparkling Pacific, and Ned tendered the wheel to the quartermaster with the intention of turning in, when the lookout shouted:

"Something athwart our bows in the water, sir!"

"What do you make it out to be?" asked Ned, going forward.

"A plank with a girl clinging to it, sir."

"Rose, by heavens!"

"Looks like it, sir."

"Let her fall off a point there!" shouted Ned to the steersman excitedly. "On the port tack, and hold her up stiff!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" replied the quartermaster, spinning his wheel.

The boom of the mainsail swung around, the canvas fluttered until several of the boys hauled on the mainsheet line, and when the forestaysail was trimmed in, the Sea Spider stood away on a tack with a three-quarter beam wind, aiming at a dark object floating in the water some distance ahead.

Upon a nearer approach, it was seen to be a plank, as the keen lookout descried, with Rose clinging to it with one arm, while with the other she frantically beckoned to them.

Within a few minutes the sloop reached the half-exhausted girl, and Ned, clinging to the bob-stay beneath the bowsprit, reached down as the yacht dashed up to her, caught the girl by the arm and lifted her out of the water.

A thrill of joy passed over him.

With the assistance of several of the boys, who were crowded up in the bow eagerly looking over, Ned got the drenched girl up on deck, and asked excitedly:

"How under heaven did you get there, Rose?"

The girl was weeping with excess of gladness over her escape from abandonment and death, and sobbed:

"Oh, Ned, I thought I was lost! When the fire on the island became too unbearable, I sprang into the sea, grasping that

plank, which was floating in the water beneath. As the hours passed by, I feared I was lost, but now——"

"Then we left you behind us on the island?"

"I came ashore and fell asleep in one of the hammocks swung in amid the trees, and I did not know that I was deserted until the fire had gained headway and awakened me by its intense heat. Had you not found me just now my fast waning strength would have left me entirely, and I would certainly have drowned."

The boy led her into the cabin, and left her there to change her clothing, as she had an ample wardrobe on board.

"It is simply wonderful that we saw her," thought Ned, as he turned in down in the forecabin. "In the uncertain light between darkness and dawn we might have passed her floating body, but the broad light of the morning sun clearly showed her to the lookout, and we can thank the radiant orb of day for her salvation."

The crew of the other yacht was informed of the finding of the girl, and they sent a cheer over the water that made Ned's blood tingle before he finally fell asleep.

It was late in the afternoon when he aroused himself and went up on deck to assume his duty, and the first thing he heard was a cry from the lookout of:

"Sail ho! Sail ho!"

"Where away?" demanded the boy, glancing hastily around.

But before the lookout finished telling him it was a bark bearing down on them under full sail, on the windward side, he saw the vessel and scanned her closely.

She was a fine-looking craft of about one thousand tons burden, and was heading straight for the Sea Spider.

The grassy sea had been left many miles astern, and the two yachts, with a flowing breeze, clear water, and a fine day, were sailing along within one hundred yards of each other.

The wind had shifted, so that they were now beating against it. Most all hands were on deck, and as the stranger had light ballast and a vast area of canvas spread, it soon forged up to them, and came in hailing distance.

"Haul to, there!" shouted a man standing at the weather shrouds forward. "I want to board your craft!"

Ned passed the word aft to comply, wondering who the stranger was, and what he wanted, when the yacht swung up in the wind.

The barque sailed on until it was within a cable's length of the sloop, when a boat was lowered from its side, manned by half a dozen men, and was rowed to the side of the Sea Spider.

All the men wore neat uniforms, and one of them had on a suit denoting him to be the captain.

They made fast alongside the yacht, and the whole party then came up on deck by means of a rope ladder hanging over the Sea Spider's port bulwarks.

Ned approached the men, and both he and the strange captain saluted each other in naval fashion, the newcomers staring keenly around at everything to be seen.

"Well, sir," queried Ned, "what can I do for you?"

"Ain't these two vessels the ones I saw in the little Sargasso sea, a couple of days ago?" queried the stranger.

"We were there," admitted Ned. "What of it?"

"I am coming to that. Now, didn't you leave a peculiar floating island which has been drifting on the outer margin of that sea many years at the mercy of the encircling Japanese currents?"

"We did, sir; but you seem to have been watching over our movements pretty closely from a distance where we failed to notice you."

"Aye, now, so we were. And the golden cargo in the old galleons beneath the island, didn't you unship it and take it on these two yachts?" queried the stranger, with an impatient gesture.

A suspicion that there was a deep motive in these questions flashed over Ned's mind, and he replied, rather tartly:

"My dear sir, your questions are becoming too personal, and I'm sorry to say I'll have to decline answering them any further."

"Which means," calmly said the man, in unmoved tone "that you had unladen the island of its treasure, and had it on your boats."

"By what right, sir, do you question anything which I may have done?"

"I'll tell you, my boy. Two years ago I fell in with the Floating Gold Mine, discovered its secret, and kept it. Having no money to fit out an expedition to get it, I awaited chance to get hold of somebody else's vessel to use for the purpose."

"Well?"

"The chance came. I shipped on this bark as first mate, and during our voyage from San Francisco to China the captain died, and I assumed command. Telling the crew about the gold, and offering them a share in it to aid me in securing it, we came in search of the floating island, only to see that you had preceded us."

"Well, sir?"

"Observing all your actions with powerful glasses at a distance, we saw that you must be getting the gold, and last night saw the island in flames. Suspecting that you had the gold and had fired the island, we beat about in search of you until now."

"Well, sir?"

"Finding you, and imagining our surmise to be correct, we mean to take what belongs to us by right of prior discovery."

"But if I can prove that my knowledge and claim to it date years before yours, and therefore refuse to give it up, sir," demanded Ned.

"Then, sooner than be balked out of it," coolly replied the other, "as my craft is manned by a very large, determined crew, and carries several guns, in case of trouble with the Chinese pirates, we would force you to give it to us."

"Well, sir," said Ned coolly, "I have got the gold on my two boats. I refuse to give it up to you, and I now defy you to do your worst to get it by fair means or foul!"

"Don't be rash! It's as much as your lives are worth, and it may settle the fate of your boats, to refuse."

"You have my decisive answer, sir."

"Very well," said the stranger, bowing politely. "We'll see. He put a whistle to his lips, and blew a shrill blast on it."

Hardly had the sound died away when two port holes opened as if by magic in the side of the bark, and in the opening there frowned the muzzles of as many guns, trained to bear upon the two yachts.

Ned smiled at the sight.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "You have shown me your fangs. I will now show you mine!" and he pulled a revolver out of his pocket, and aimed it at the strange captain's head, adding in calm, decided tones: "You are my prisoner, sir! Move or speak and I'll blow your brains out. Now send one of your men back to the bark with orders to sail away; and if within five minutes my command isn't complied with, as true as there is a Heaven above, sir, I'll put a bullet in your head!"

CHAPTER XVII.

A FIGHT WITH GUNS.

Ned's determined action took the captain of the strange bark by surprise, and the man started back, turning deathly pale, his five sailors recoiling in alarm equal to his own.

It was evident that Ned would shoot the stranger if he did not comply at once with his order.

The plucky Yankee boy was not much alarmed at the sight of the two guns on the bark, covering the yachts at the strange captain's signal whistle.

He had the man at his mercy, and he knew that as long as he kept him so the strangers could not wrest the gold from the yachts.

Ned's claim had the priority over the strangers' discovery of the gold, and he meant to assert it at all hazards.

"Do you intend to obey me or not?" asked the boy.

"Send my vessel away?" gasped the outwitted man.

"Yes—at once—without offering to molest us."

"But my claim—"

"No excuses. Do it or die!"

"Can't I go back myself and—"

"Bah! don't imagine I am a fool to give you your liberty so that you can annoy us. Quick—your answer!"

The man, with a baffled look, turned to one of his sailors.

"Row back to the Black Hawk and give my orders to set sail at once!" exclaimed the man. "It is as much as my life is worth to attempt to get the treasure from these fellows."

The last sentence was spoken in a significant tone, and Ned apprehended at once that the sailor might incite those on the bark to attack the yachts with their guns when he got on board.

The afternoon sun was declining. Rose and all hands were on deck, and the crew of the Jumping Jenny were looking on in surprise at a distance of several hundred yards from the Sea Spider.

"Remember one thing," said Ned to the sailor as he was about to depart, "at the first sign of treachery from your vessel I will slay your captain. And impress upon the minds of your crew that sooner than give them the satisfaction of robbing me we would scuttle or burn the yachts, sacrificing our lives in order to sink the gold to the bottom of the sea—out of your clutches. I am prepared for any emergency."

The sailor scowled, silently saluted Ned, went down the rope ladder into his quarter boat and rowed back to the bark.

"Seize these men and bind them to the rails," said Ned.

None of the sailors offered any resistance when Ned's crew obeyed this order, as they were afraid of the young captain's pistol, which swayed from one to the other while they were being tied up.

Ned was thoroughly satisfied.

He had turned the tables on his foe.

"You have simply thrust yourself in a trap," he told the captain.

"What do you intend to do now?" gruffly asked the stranger.

"Start on our homeward cruise, which you interrupted."

"And us?"

"You shall remain my prisoners."

"That is high-handed, young man!"

"Not in the least. I am protecting myself, that's all."

"But we have not attempted to do you any injury."

"No, not yet, because I forestalled you; but you would."

"It doesn't signify what might happen in the future."

"Oh, I don't agree with you, sir; you might kill us. As a measure of precaution I'm going to hold you and carry you as a hostage until we reach the Pacific seaboard of California. Then I'll let you go."

"Since I have done nothing wrong you have no right to hold me!" grumbled the stranger, persistently, "and I shall appeal to the law, when we reach harbor, to prosecute you." Ned shrugged his shoulders.

He understood that this man had not attempted to get the gold sooner, as he evidently wanted Ned to undergo the trouble of shipping it.

Then, when it was all read to take it away he swooped down on the yachts to have only a fight to steal it from the boy.

It was a mean trick, and the boy said, scornfully:

"You can do it if you choose. I'll run my chances on that."

And so saying, Ned went aft, grasped the wheel, and putting the yacht on the wind, he sailed away from the bark, followed immediately by the Jumping Jenny.

When the sloop had gone some distance from the Black Hawk Ned glanced back and saw the sailor board his vessel.

"What a rare opportunity the prisoners of the Jumping Jenny missed!" muttered Ned. "Had Tom Redfern been given the chance he would doubtless have joined forces with this semi-pirate and between the gangs of both we would have been crushed!"

He was wondering what effect his actions would have on the crew of the Black Hawk, when there suddenly pealed a thunderous discharge from one of the port-hole guns on the bark, and a screaming shot came flying over the water toward the Sea Spider.

Owing to the swell of the sea the ball missed its mark, flying clear over the deck of the yacht and falling into the water some distance away, where it went hissing out of sight.

"It's getting rather hot!" remarked Ned, coolly, to old Ralph Hooker, who stood balancing himself on his wooden leg, close by.

"Werry!" admitted the old grumbler, muttering a string of the choicest expletives against those on the bark.

"Take the wheel, Ralph, and keep the yacht on as she is going. I'll return his bark with a taste of the brass signal gun up forward there, just to show them that we've got nerve to give as good as he sends."

"Ay, ay! Now that's ther style!" growled Hooker.

He grasped the wheel, cocked his good eye at an angle from the staring, glass one, and Ned hastened up to the bows.

The gun in question was a mere toy, yet it was capable of doing considerable damage once it was loaded, and although Ned had no experience with ordnance, he meant to fire a shot back at his enemy.

"Rose, go down in the cabin out of harm's way," said he to the girl as he passed her. "It's dangerous out here now."

The girl hastily obeyed him, and telling one of the crew to bring up some ammunition, he had the canvas cover taken off the gun just as the bark came about and started in pursuit of him.

"Tie the prisoners at intervals apart, at the bulwarks, where any shots from the bark would be most likely to hit them!" he shouted as he rammed home a charge in the gun.

To the terror of the prisoners, this was done.

As soon as the gun was ready to fire Ned trained it to bear upon the approaching bark.

"Port your wheel and come about!" he cried.

The yacht rounded up in the wind, the booms swung to and fro, and as the yacht's broadside was presented toward the bark, Ned hastily sighted the gun and fired it.

A boom, a flash and a scream followed.

And a heavy charge of bullets went flying toward the bark, as no other kind of shot was on board.

They swept over the pursuer's deck.

A wild chorus of shouts and cries of distress followed, showing plainly that Ned's aim was true.

The bark broached to for a while, and to Ned's surprise and joy he heard another shot peal from the Jumping Jenny and saw Billy Roe brandishing a gun swab and gesturing wildly to his crew.

The shot from the schooner was aimed higher than Ned's, and ribboned the studding sails of the bark.

They saw the wildest confusion ensuing on board their

enemy's boat, and then another shot came from the Black Hawk.

It struck the Sea Spider below the water line, with a crash, splitting a gaping hole in the planking that was destined to sink her!

"All hands on deck and get the boats ready for launching!" cried Ned. "I'm afraid the Sea Spider is sinking."

He hurried down in the hold and saw the sea water pouring in through a big hole in the side, flooding the inside of the yacht.

"The Sea Spider and her cargo of gold is doomed!" he gasped.

Then he hurried up on deck, where he saw the Jumping Jenny approaching at a signal from one of the boys.

The sloop was heeled over and tossing helplessly, some of the crew preparing the quarter-boats in which to escape.

Another shot came from the Black Hawk.

It crashed into the hull of the yacht close to the spot where the first ball struck and she began to fill up faster.

"The gun is loaded again, sir," said one of the boys to Ned.

"Good! I'll have a last shot at that fellow ere we abandon the Sea Spider and go on board of the schooner."

There were a number of men in a group on the Black Hawk's deck, and Ned aimed the gun toward them.

When he fired, these men disappeared.

Struck by the shots, they paid the penalty of their crimes.

It threw the enemy's crew into dire confusion, and gave the Jumping Jenny a chance to range alongside the sinking yacht.

All of Ned's boys went on board the schooner.

Just as the little captain was about to follow them the captain of the bark shouted to him:

"Come back and take us with you!"

Ned paused, glanced angrily at the prisoners, and replied, coldly:

"Since you brought this misfortune upon us and yourselves, jointly, you will remain where you are and sink with the wreck!"

"Oh, heaven! Don't leave us to our fate!" yelled the man, imploringly, and the five others began to groan, beg and plead to be released, but Ned shook his head.

"You intended no mercy for us," said the boy, sternly, as he pointed his finger skyward. "Look for your mercy up there!"

And ignoring the raving, cursing and yelling of the prisoners, he went on board the Jumping Jenny and saw the bark go sailing toward the wreck to rescue the captives.

Before she could reach the foundering sloop it sunk.

The prisoners went down with her.

The schooner stood away from the spot, and Ned descried a distant ship bearing down upon them under full sail.

The crew of the Black Hawk were furious over the deaths of their five messmates and captain, and came sailing after the Jumping Jenny, intent upon wreaking their vengeance upon Ned Harland and his friends.

Upon observing it Ned became uneasy.

"They have caused us to lose one-third of the gold thus far, Billy," he said to his mate, "and if they attack us now and sink the schooner, dread the worst."

"They haven't sunk us yet, though," said Billy, hopefully.

"Who can this stranger be who is coming?"

"Can't make her out yet. She might aid us, though."

A shot from the Black Hawk came whistling toward them, but fell short of its mark.

"Hostilities have begun in earnest," remarked Ned. "Let's fire at the beggars with our gun."

An exchange of many shots followed, none of which created any serious damage, and the skirmish was at its hottest when the strange vessel came in gun range.

It was a large sloop.

And she ran up in the wind and fired a shot between the two vessels, ordering them to suspend hostilities.

Ned looked at her with his spyglass.

She was an American sloop of war!

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONCLUSION.

The sloop of war was one of the fleet sent to protect the Alaska fisheries, and its nature had evidently not been discovered till now, by the crew of the bark.

Quick to apprehend his safety, Ned ran up the American flag, inverted, as a signal of distress, to his masthead, and as soon as it was perceived by the gunboat men she sailed for the bark and fired another shot athwart its bows.

The guns, the formidable look, and the order to haul to, all had their effect upon the crew of the Black Hawk.

She came about, with the obvious intention of flight, when another howling shot that came after her sufficed to let her crew see that escape was out of the question.

Reluctantly she hove to, and the gunboat rode up to within easy range of her, covered by a battery of guns that could have blown her out of the water, the bark was held at bay and a quarter-boat left the sloop of war.

It was manned by an officer and four marines.

They rowed over to the Jumping Jenny, and when the officer came on board the yacht Ned met him at the gangway.

Saluting each other, while the naval officer took a keen survey of his surroundings on the yacht, Ned said:

"You have just arrived in time to save us from that pirate, sir."

"Pirate!" echoed the officer with a start as he bent a glance of surprise upon the bark. "Is it indeed a pirate?"

"She is. You saw her pursuing us, I presume?"

"You were exchanging shots as she ran after you."

"I was trying to defend myself against her attacks."

A short dialogue followed, in which Ned gave the officer a brief account of all his adventures, at the end of which he said:

"To prove my assertion, I will show you our cargo of gold."

"It is a wonderful story, said the naval officer, "and the best proof you could give me of your sincerity would be a sight of the gold you mentioned. Where is it?"

Ned showed him his precious cargo.

"You now can see, sir," said he, "that the crew of the Black Hawk had an inducement to attack us."

"Ay—a great inducement."

Ned then showed him the imprisoned crew of the Sea Spider.

"These are my enemies from Black's Cove," said the boy. "I am bringing them back to civilization to put them in the hands of the law to pay the penalty of their crimes against me."

"Quite right—but allow me to question one of them. It is imperative that I should prove every suspicious circumstance."

Ned was willing, and one of the prisoners was brought up on deck, where, under a skillful cross-examination, he was forced by the naval officer to admit all Ned said.

This satisfied him that Ned's story was true.

Clearly then those on the Black Hawk must be the aggressors, and promising Ned their protection in case he established the guilt of the bark's crew, the officer took his departure.

"I doubt if the crew of that craft will molest us any further, now!" said Ned, with a grim smile, as he watched the officer go aboard of the Black Hawk.

"Mebbe he won't an' mebbe he will prove 'em guilty," said Ralph Hooker, with a growl at the pirates, "but I reckon as he will; and dash me if I ain't a-hopin' as he'll bombard ther lubbers an' sen' thar craft deep inter Davy Jones' locker!"

With which benediction Ralph took a fresh chew of navy plug.

Ned kept the Jumping Jenny luffed up in the wind to see what the result of the affair would be.

Within a few moments there sounded a pistol shot on the deck of the bark, and he saw the officer spring back into his boat, which was rowed as fast as possible back to the sloop of war, followed by a volley of firearms, a shot from one of which seemed to hit one of the seamen.

The moment the officer got on board the war sloop a heavy gun was discharged at the bark, the ball carrying away one of her masts and disabling her so that she could not sail away rapidly.

Then the sloop darted toward her, and, ranging alongside, the crew boarded the bark, where a hot conflict was fought.

Within an hour the crew of the Black Hawk was rendered helpless, and having been ironed and taken on board the war vessel, they were made prisoners and a prize crew was put on the bark to work her back to port.

The officer who had spoken to Ned then returned to the Jumping Jenny and shook hands with the boy captain.

"I am satisfied of the character of those fellows now," said he with a smile. "Upon my discovering their rascality they tried to hold me on their vessel as a hostage, but I shot one and escaped. We have made prisoners of them and confiscated their vessel, which we will take to the nearest port."

"I am glad they are brought to justice, sir," replied Ned.

"All that is necessary now," said the lieutenant, for such was his rank, "is your affidavit, covering all the facts you stated, which will prove them to be pirates. With such a document we will have sufficient evidence of their crime to convict them."

"I will gladly give it to you," said Ned, "and you can also have the crew of the Sea Spider on the same charge. I will accompany you to port to make the charge."

To preclude the possibility of accident to Ned, preventing him doing as he offered, though, they retired to his cabin, where the paper was drawn up, signed and witnessed by the whole crew.

This done, the officer took leave of Ned, returned to his own vessel, sail was made, and the three crafts started for the eastward.

"It looks as if our troubles were over at last, Rose," said Ned that night, as they stood out on deck. "Although we did not succeed in getting more than about half the gold there was on the Floating Gold Mine, there is enough to make us all rich. Tom Redfern's race is run, and he, with his crew, will go to a deserved prison. Upon my return I intend to produce the papers in my possession and lay claim to the wealth out of which my dead uncle cheated me, and then——"

"Then what?" asked the girl as he paused.

But Ned looked down here, all confused.

He wasn't much of a hand at making love, and the girl was modest, so that between the pair they didn't arrive at any conclusion, but only succeeded in getting themselves in a nervous fit, and ended in running away from each other, too ashamed to continue their talk.

A week passed uneventfully by, during which the three vessels made slow progress, but they finally came to anchor off Pacific City, in Washington Territory, and there the prisoners were taken ashore to be dealt with as they deserved.

The cargo of gold was then unshipped and sold, a tremendous amount of money resulting, which Ned equally divided among all hands.

Overjoyed at their extraordinary good fortune, and at the

prospect of speedily being at home again, they finally set sail down the coast in the Jumping Jenny, and headed for California.

Fair weather and good winds prevailing throughout the trip, they finally passed the headland and ran in to Black's Cove.

News of their coming preceded them to the little fisher village, one of the men having seen them coming, and when the yacht came to anchor off the old, wooden pier and all hands went ashore, all the people in the village were gathered there to welcome them.

The story of Ned's troubles was recited to them by Billy Roe, who stood on an inverted barrel, and at its conclusion, ending with the boy's vindication of the suspicion of having murdered his uncle, and the downfall of Tom Redfern, a mighty cheer arose from the people.

It rang out over the bay, and ere its echoes rebounded from the crags, Ned was lifted on their shoulders, with the girl, and amid the wildest acclamations they ran to Jasper Redfern's house with the young couple, never pausing until Rose and the boy were stood upon the broad piazza.

It was a hearty welcome, showing plainly enough in what high esteem Ned and Rose were held, and the boy's eyes filled with tears.

When the crowd dispersed Ned and the girl entered the house and there met with Jasper Redfern's lawyer, who having heard of Ned's return had come to discover what became of Tom.

Ned's story filled him with amazement.

"Tom Redfern in jail—you the heir?" he gasped. "Really it seems like a fairy story. But prove your claims, Ned Harland, and as Tom Redfern left everything in my hands before he sailed, I will turn every cent of old Jasper's fortune over to you if your evidence warrants it."

He was an honest man, Ned knew, and the boy retained him on the spot to prosecute his claim with the papers he had taken from Redfern's safe.

Within a short time, backed by Ralph Hooker's sworn statement, Ned gained control of his fortune, as his case was conclusively proven, and he became enormously rich.

The Jumping Jenny never passed out of his hands, his old crew, well off through his generosity, never left his service when he went out in the yacht, and grumpy old Ralph Hooker became a fixture on her, faithful to Ned to the end, now that he had ample means to get all the rum and tobacco he wanted.

Rose left Black's Cove Villa to enter a classical seminary, from which she graduated with flying colors in the course of a few years. Our hero was then at a marriageable age, and as the girl was nothing loth, they were duly wedded.

And thus ends our story, as it should, with our hero and heroine happily mated, their ambition attained, the wicked reaping the harvest of their iniquity, and the wealth of the FLOATING GOLD MINE in hands that would put it to the best good.

[THE END.]

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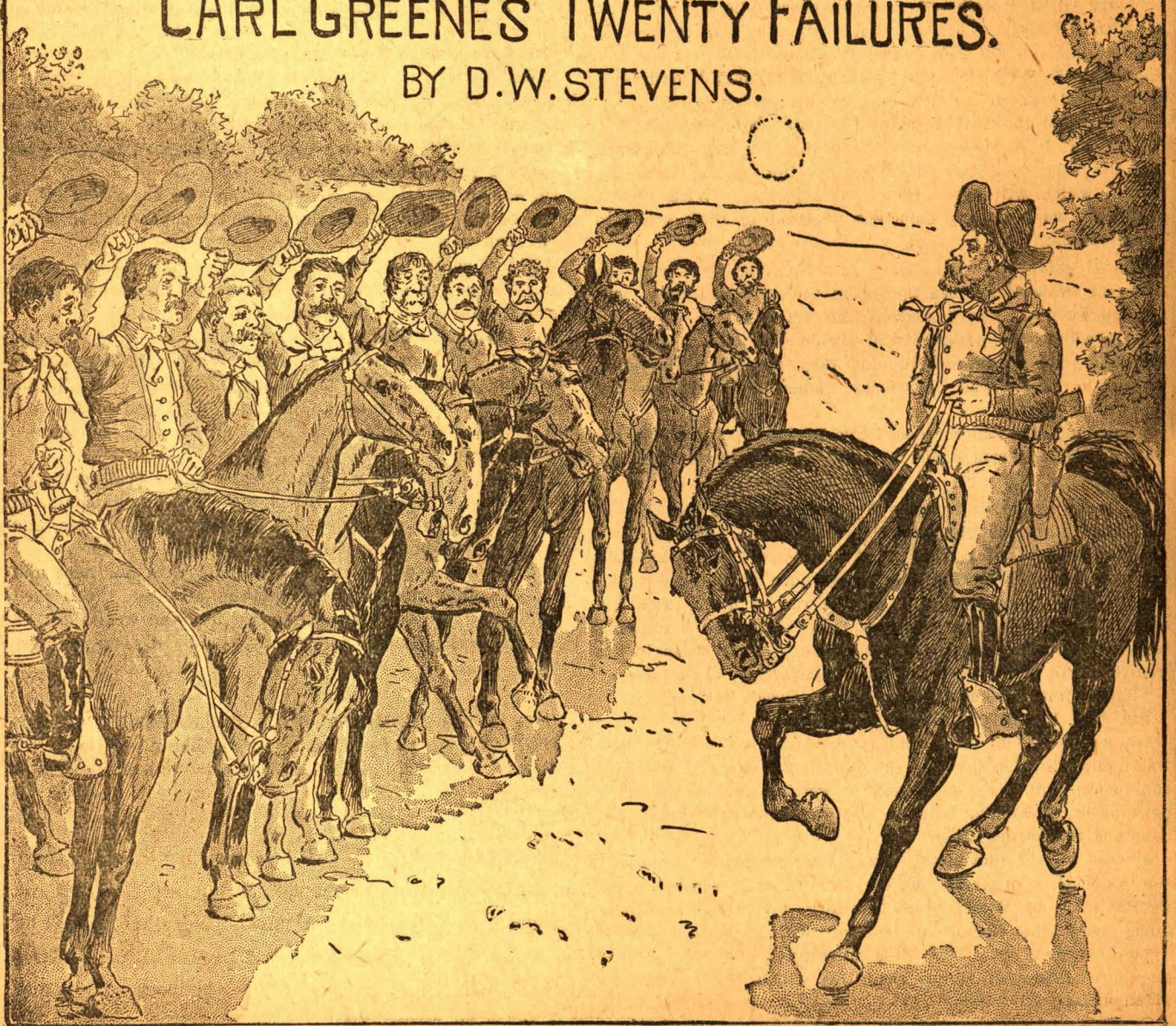
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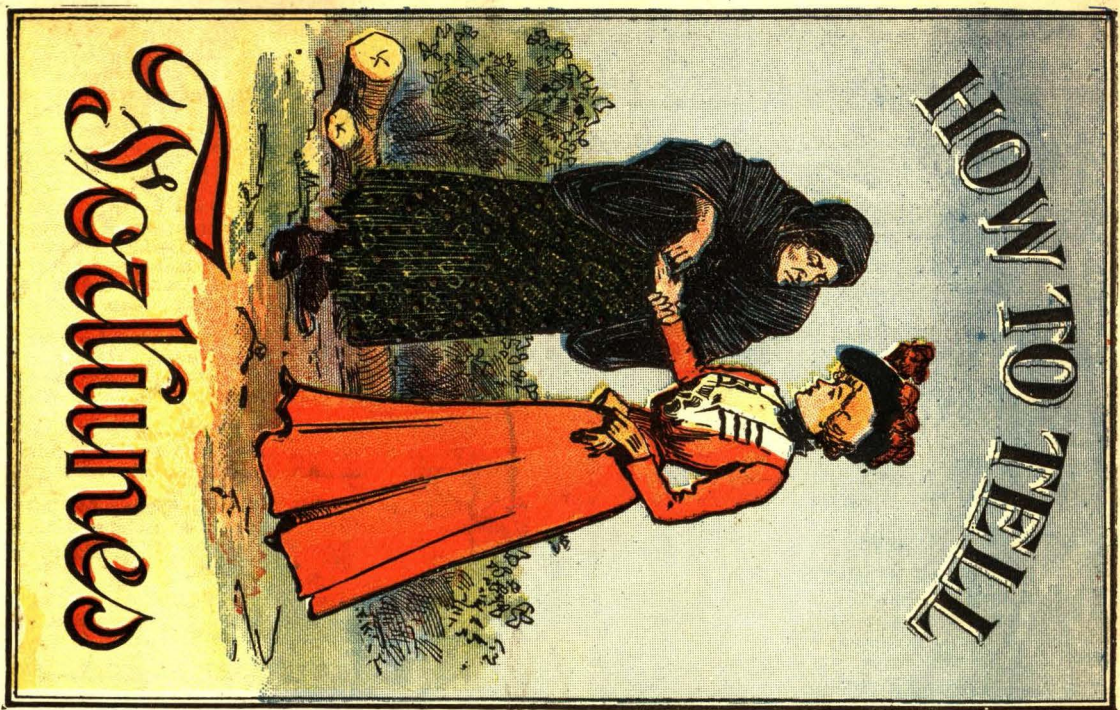
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